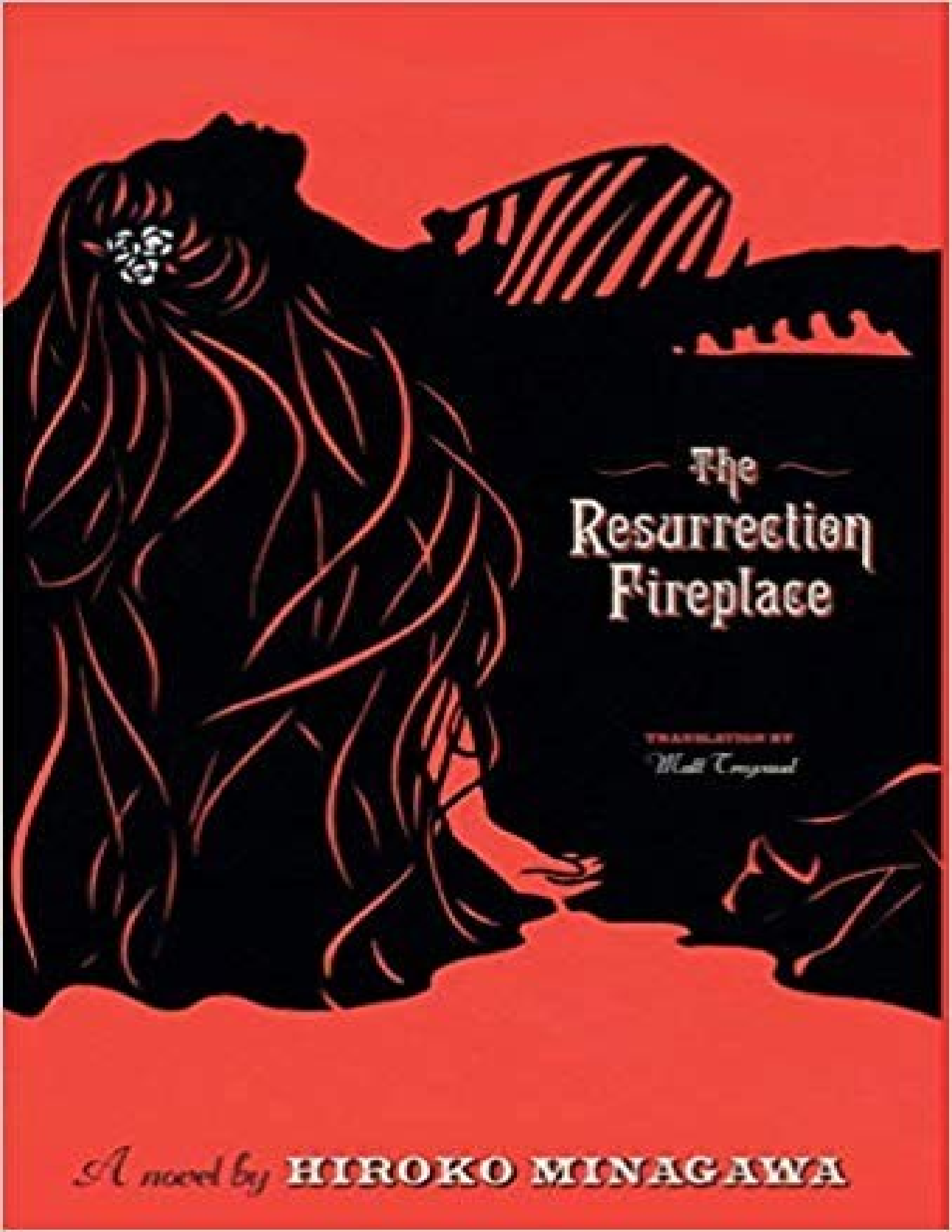
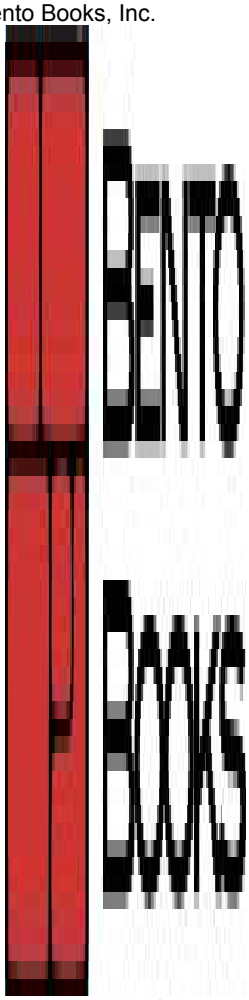
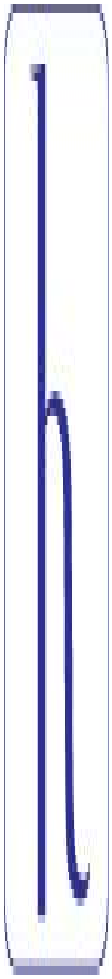

The
Resurrection
Fireplace
TRANSLATION BY
Matt Treyvaud
A novel by HIROKO MINAGAWA

The Resurrection Fireplace

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Chapter 1

"Hide it!"

Clarence opened the rear door just enough to hiss the warning into the room before pulling it shut again from the outside.

The body lying face-up on the dissecting table had been sliced open with an X-shaped incision across its swollen abdominal region, with the four triangular flaps of skin folded back to expose the gravid womb within.

Beneath the table, a dog of mixed pedigree lay curled up on the sawdust-strewn floor.

Daniel Barton, a surgeon at St. George's Hospital, was just injecting the blood vessels on the surface of the womb with coloured wax, stubby fingers working the syringe with surprising delicacy. Having already filled the arteries with red wax, he was now introducing blue wax into the veins.

They were not at St. George's. This was Barton's own private anatomy school.

Benjamin "Fatty" Beamis, who had been watching his teacher's hands closely, looked up at Clarence's warning, rosy cheeks turning pale.

"Professor, please stop the procedure for a moment," whispered Edward Turner, another of Barton's pupils.

"Can't," said Barton. "The wax will harden."

"We haven't time. They will be here any moment. We apologize, but…"

Ben took one of Barton's arms. Albert "Skinny" Wood took the other. A fourth pupil, Nigel Hart, looked up from his half-finished drawing of the cadaver in black lead pencil, meeting Edward's eyes. The two nodded and prepared to move the body.

"Wait! Do not damage it!"

Barton was just past forty, with a countenance not unlike a potato. He refused to wear a powdered wig, dismissing the very custom as a nuisance, and bared his shock of red hair even when delivering a public lecture. The current dissection, of course, was not part of the school's curriculum, but for a man of his position to go wigless was like appearing in public clad only in his drawers.

Struggling against Ben and Al, who held his arms firmly behind his back, the potato now became as florid as if it had been dyed with cochineal.

"Trust us, Professor. We'll take good care of the body. If they discover

it, they will only confiscate it."

More to the point, everyone present would be thrown in gaol.

"Professor, please be calm. It would make matters easier for all of us."

Nigel and Edward laid the cadaver on a white sheet on the floor, then wrapped the sheet around it and secured the bundle with wide strips of cloth before carrying it towards the fireplace.

"Be careful!" said Barton. "That is a very rare and precious find!"

"As we well know."

Fortunately, it was July. No fire was lit.

Nigel lowered the fire door at the top of the fireplace so that it hung down vertically from just below the mantelpiece, concealing the upper third of the firebox from view. This would arouse no suspicion: such fire doors were common, and it was usual to lower them when the fireplace was unused in summer.

Edward opened a secret door next to the fireplace and entered a narrow space hollowed out within the thick wall. A sturdy winch was installed inside.

This chamber and apparatus had been prepared by Barton's pupils for just such situations. The five had worked together to complete the job, since they could not entrust it to other people.

Using chisels and saws to open skulls and section bones was hardly easy work, but the construction had been a major undertaking. First they had removed bricks from the wall to create the opening. Next they had set up a winch inside, added a catch to prevent the handle unwinding, and attached a pulley to the wall adjoining the fireplace. Finally, they had made an opening in the wall and passed a rope with a hook through it.

Today they would put the results to use for the first time.

Clarence entered the room. "Is it hidden?" he asked.

"Completely."

"Cupboard," said Clarence, pointing. All the pupils except Edward, who was still in the winch chamber, dragged the cupboard in front of the secret door. The door had been papered to match the rest of the wall, though on close inspection the seams were visible. The cupboard was left empty to make it easier to move, helping to conceal the door further, but was quite heavy even so.

"Bent-nose" Toby, Barton's doorkeeper and factotum, arrived to

announce the arrival of two Bow Street Runners, constables employed by the magistrate for the City and Liberty of Westminster. This formality gave the pupils a little more time, and they hurried to put the room in order before Toby actually showed the visitors in.

Barton's face was still red, and no less like a potato, when he greeted them. In his right hand he held a scalpel still wet with gore.

"Stealing bodies again, Professor?"

"Come now, Mr. Hales! Your suspicions are absurd," said Clarence, a practiced smile on his freckled face.

Constables Hales and Bray were quite familiar to Barton's students. This was not the first time the pair had forced their way into the school.

The constables screwed up their faces and covered their noses.

"Stinks even worse than usual in here today," said Bray. "Turns my stomach, it does."

"It must be the heat," said Clarence. "You may smell no better when you pass on."

Hales ignored him. "The grave-robbers were, as usual, Gobbin and Dick," he said, looking around the dissection room. "They told us everything. Paid a pretty penny this time, eh, Professor? That Dick was bragging about asking more than the market rate for the bother of shifting the mortsafe."

The five pupils stood in a row before the dissecting table, blocking the constables' view:

Clarence "the Chatterbox" Spooner, twenty-two years old.

Ben "Fatty" Beamis, twenty-one.

Al "Skinny" Wood, twenty-three.

Refined and elegant Edward Turner, twenty-one.

Nigel Hart, just nineteen but a gifted illustrator with an eye for detail.

But wait—in reality, the row was only four pupils long. Refined and elegant Edward had failed to leave the hidden chamber in time, and was still in there waiting.

"Move," said Bray, shoving the pupils aside.

Strapped to the dissecting table was a dog, rendered senseless with ether. Part of its leg had been opened to expose an artery.

"You intrude on a delicate procedure," Clarence said with lofty condescension. He was by far the most accomplished among them at

talking his way out of trouble. “To interrupt such work as this! As you see, we are peeling away the arterial walls, layer by layer and with great care, until we can perceive the flow of blood within.”

“That’s all my eye,” snorted Bray.

“You are wrong, sir. It is a most important matter. We intend to ascertain whether the arterial wall possesses the power of self-regeneration. Imagine, Mr. Bray, that you had been pierced in an artery and were bleeding copiously. Would it not be a great comfort to know that your arterial wall could rebuild itself?”

The guinea that Al slipped the constable proved immediately effective in a way that Clarence’s inflated chatter did not; this, too, was not unusual. Bray closed his mouth. Al’s skinny form belied his bulging purse: his father was a successful trader. A guinea was two days’ wages for a surgeon. A guinea could buy a whole butt of gin. Grave-robbers, too, generally charged a guinea per body. Under most circumstances, a guinea was enough to buy silence—but Hales snatched the coin, with its bas-relief portrait of King George III, from Bray’s hand, and placed it beside the dog’s leg.

Refusing bribes on principle was another unique custom of the Bow Street Runners.

When the previous magistrate for Westminster, Henry Fielding, was appointed, the position of magistrate itself was virtually an honorary one, public service done for almost no reward, and there was no public police force in the city of London. Private individuals—“thief-takers”—had borne that burden, receiving payment for the criminals they arrested. Miscreants wanted for capital crimes were particularly valuable. But because thief-takers had no other guaranteed income, they eagerly apprehended even those guilty of only minor infractions—or, indeed, nothing at all. Conversely, bribe a thief-taker generously enough, and he would overlook even the most vicious of crimes.

Henry Fielding had reformed this system. Placing a few trusted officers under his direct command, he had paid them a fixed salary and strictly forbidden them to accept bribes.

His younger half-brother, Sir John Fielding, had worked alongside him on this project, even becoming the next magistrate for Westminster upon Henry’s death—a position he continued to hold at present. Sir John had expanded and strengthened the force, establishing district stations and

working with officers there to apprehend criminals. He had formed both foot and mounted patrols where there had once been nothing but a night watch staffed by elderly "Charlies." He had only so many public officials at his disposal, however, and thus there were still many private individuals who made a living informing on or capturing others for a fee.

Sir John, who had lost his sight as a young man, also went by the name of "the Blind Beak." His hearing had grown sharper to compensate, and he was known and feared by criminals as a man who could tell truth from lies from the speaker's voice alone.

The law enforcers under Henry and, later, Sir John were known as the Bow Street Runners after the address of their headquarters: 4 Bow Street, Covent Garden. This building served as both residence and office for the magistrate, and even had facilities for temporarily detaining captured individuals. Hearings for minor offences were delegated to the magistrate, while more serious cases were referred to the Sessions House for London and Middlesex—better known by its nickname, "the Old Bailey." Suspects were held in gaol for the duration of their trial.

Daniel Barton's anatomy school was in Covent Garden, too, between Leicester Square and Castle Street, not far from Sir John's offices. It should be noted, however, that the term "Daniel Barton's anatomy school" is something of a misnomer: although Barton and his pupils were currently in his private dissection room, the school itself belonged to his elder brother, Robert Barton, and was therefore named the Robert Barton School of Anatomy.

The Bow Street Runners were known for their integrity, but the pay they received was meagre, albeit regular: from thirteen shillings and sixpence to, at most, seventeen shillings a week. The citizens of London took as dim a view of paying the police from public funds as of granting them public authority, and the government showed little interest in providing the necessary funds either. The ideals of the Fielding brothers notwithstanding, it was inevitable that the Runners should include some such as Hales and Bray.

"Mr. Barton," Hales said, softening his tone. "This is a serious business. The body you bought last night was that of Miss Elaine Roughhead, beloved daughter of Sir Charles."

The pupils exchanged glances. A baronet's unmarried daughter, six

months pregnant?

"But nothing *was* bought," cried Clarence quickly.

The other three pupils began to talk as well, saying whatever came into their heads, intent on preventing Barton's muttered "Daughter? Unmarried, then?" from reaching the constables' ears. In anatomy and experimental science, their professor was without equal, but they were painfully familiar with his disregard for virtually every other concern.

"Do you know the Roughheads?" asked Hales.

"No," said Barton bluntly. "They are not among my patients. A baronet, was it? Paid handsomely for the title, no doubt."

"The mortal remains of a young woman about to become a mother, sliced to bits," sighed Bray. "That's a heartless thing to do."

"Mr. Bray." Barton's voice was cold. "Would you care to be treated by a doctor ignorant even of where the stomach was located?"

"This is not about—"

"Do you know, Mr. Bray," Barton continued, ignoring the other's protests, "which organ it is that circulates blood through your body?"

"I may not be an educated man, Mr. Barton, but I know that much." He thumped his chest.

"Correct," said Barton. "The heart. However, until little more than a century ago, it was generally believed that blood came from the liver. The fact that blood circulates throughout the body was unknown even to physicians. The heart's role in circulating the blood was proven through dissection by the physician William Harvey—a fellow countryman of ours, as it happens. A quite remarkable achievement. And yet—and yet!"—he turned his eyes heavenwards, catching sight of the dirty plaster ceiling—"it is in England that the science of anatomy has progressed the least, due to prejudice regarding the dissection of human bodies. Each year, the state provides just six criminal cadavers for dissection—in a year!—and even this pitiful offering is monopolized by the Company of Barbers and Surgeons. Could one hope to advance the study of anatomy under such conditions?"

Barton's pupils looked on nervously. The topic was Barton's favourite, and once he began to discourse on it he lost sight of everything else, no matter whom he was addressing. Neither his Scottish burr nor his general

awkwardness as a speaker (quite suiting his potato-like demeanour) were any impediment to his jeremiads on the theme.

"In Paris, the law ensures a supply of cadavers sufficient for research purposes," he went on. "But here, in England—"

"Take it up with the big-wigs, Professor," interrupted Hales. "*Our* job is to keep the peace here in London."

"That's right," Bray chipped in. "So hand over Miss Roughhead, and be quick about it."

Hales remained matter-of-fact. "If you'd only taken the body of Miss Roughhead's nurse instead, we wouldn't have had none of this fuss," he said.

"Her nurse died too?" asked Barton.

"By her own hand. Unconsolable, she was, at the death of her charge."

"They say she took poison at Miss Roughhead's grave and toppled over on the spot," added Bray.

"What was the poison?" asked Barton, unable to conceal his professional interest.

"How should we know?"

"A shame," Barton sighed. "I should have liked to have that body as well."

"You keep changing the subject. Where'd you hide Miss Roughhead? You want us to ransack the place?"

Barton's four pupils all swept into a low bow. *Pray do as you please*.

Without hesitating, the constables began to search the dissection room, even pulling out the desk drawers ("She would hardly fit in one of those in her condition," murmured Clarence), before they moved next door.

The adjoining room was not unlike a zoo. A seal, a leopard, a monkey, an opossum, a mongoose, a crocodile: some had been opened at the abdomen, while others had been prepared in such a way as to partially expose their skeletons. If they had been alive, the screams and roars of pain would have been deafening.

On other shelves were rows of specimens in glass jars full of preserving fluids, or skeletal forms standing upright.

"Don't touch them! Don't touch my specimens!"

Ignoring his distress, Bray tugged the sea lion's whiskers and poked his hand into the leopard's mouth.

“Stop that!”

“Simmer down,” said Bray with a smirk. “I thought you might’ve disguised Miss Roughhead as a leopard.”

Part of the specimen room was used for the storing of cadavers. Naturally, Hales and Bray examined this area too. Had they visited in winter—dissection season—they would have found bodies acquired by all means available, legal or otherwise, treated against putrefaction and hanging from hooks, but this practice was untenable in summer. The rusted hooks hung empty as a failing butcher’s.

The school offered no lectures or public dissections in summer either. This left Barton and his five most favoured pupils to pursue their researches undisturbed in his private theatre while the rest of the student body enjoyed a welcome holiday.

Adjoining the specimen room were the students’ dissection area and an antechamber for preparing oneself for this work. Beyond these lay the lecture hall. Access to actual human cadavers was the unique attraction of the Robert Barton School of Anatomy, but it called for a considerable, and steady, supply of the same. Before Robert’s school was established, London had offered virtually no opportunities for even medical students to work with dead bodies.

Once Robert had secured the assistance of his younger brother Daniel, however, he had distanced himself from the unsavoury business of dissection itself. Earning the respected qualification of physician, he was made welcome in polite society. Surgeons like Daniel were considered somewhat lower in standing; at one time, surgery had been within the barber’s purview. Robert was well-groomed and conversable, moving easily among the aristocracy, while social graces were precisely what Daniel lacked.

Robert and his family currently lived at the western end of the property, separated from the school proper by a central courtyard which also served as the students’ entrance. Daniel was yet to marry, but Robert and his wife had three children. His wife’s family were wealthy gentry with a grand manor house on some ten thousand acres outside Marlow. Their financial assistance had played no small part in the opening of the school.

Passing through the ornate front entrance to Robert’s house on Leicester Square, visitors beheld a room so large it could host a ball, and a private

museum of which Robert was inordinately proud. Most of the specimens arrayed for display there had been produced by Daniel and his pupils. Robert insisted that these items were his property, since he provided the funds necessary for their creation. Daniel was not entirely in agreement with this view.

Hales and Bray returned empty-handed to the main dissection room.

"Out of the way," said Hales, pushing Ben away from the cupboard.

"No violence, pray," said Ben, placing his hand on his chest. "I have a weak heart. If I am treated roughly, its rhythm becomes quite irregular."

"Yes?" said Hales, pushing Ben again, much harder.

Ben fell onto his back and began to wheeze. As they watched, his fingers stiffened and his eyes rolled back into his head. The constables shuffled uneasily, then quickly took their leave, pocketing the gold guinea that was still sitting on the dissecting table as they went.

"Well, that is one way to get rid of them."

"Ben, they have gone. Get up."

"Oh, dear, he really has fainted. What should we do, Professor?"

"Does he in fact have a weak heart?"

"Not that I ever heard."

Clarence put his finger to the inside of Ben's wrist. "His pulse is regular," he reported.

They slapped Ben's cheeks and called his name, but this only made him groan.

It was hyperventilation he was suffering from, but the condition was not yet known to medical science at the time.

"If his pulse is regular, there is no cause for concern," said Barton briskly. "Let him lie."

His pupils' faces relaxed. If the Professor said there was no cause for concern, there was no cause for concern. His accuracy as a diagnostician was undisputed.

"Ben, when your breathing returns to normal, give me a precise report on the progress of your symptoms," Barton said, irritation in his voice. "The rest of you, back to the dissection. Retrieve the cadaver. Clear Charlie off the table."

The dog tied there let out a whine.

"Mr. Barton, Charlie's anaesthetic is wearing off."

“Another dose of ether, then. Someone stitch him up. Where is that young woman?”

“Edward! Let down the body.”

“He may be asleep. Open the secret door and wake him up.”

“To open the door, we must move the cupboard,” said Clarence. “And to move the cupboard, we must move our comatose friend.” He hooked his hands under Ben’s armpits and, with the help of Al and Nigel, dragged the corpulent body out of the way. The three of them then moved the cupboard.

Meanwhile, Barton dosed the dog with more ether himself, swiftly sewed up the animal’s wound, and put him on the floor.

“Edward, hurry up and lower the hook,” said Clarence, opening the door. Refined, elegant Edward tumbled out onto him, making him fall on his behind.

“Professor, Edward has fainted too.”

“Fetch a bellows.”

“Do you intend to test the theory that—”

“Indeed. Hurry.”

The secret chamber in the wall was cramped and entirely without ventilation. Edward had almost expired from lack of oxygen. Oxygen itself would not be identified for several more years, but the symptoms of oxygen deprivation were well known. Barton theorized that these were the result simply of insufficient air, and proposed that such patients might be revived by pumping great volumes of air into them.

His three conscious pupils hurried back with a pair of bellows. Al held Edward’s nostrils closed and guided the nozzle into his mouth while Clarence worked the mechanism, forcing air into his lungs. Barton monitored his pulse, and Nigel, looking anxious, kept a record of the proceedings in a shaky hand, checking the time on a pocket-watch Barton had lent him.

“Good. His heart is beating normally. Remove the bellows,” said Barton. Seeing Edward blearily open his eyes, he embraced him with relief, then turned and resumed giving orders. “Carry him up to bed. Keep him warm and rub him with aromatic oils.”

It was, overall, a rather different response from the way he had treated Ben.

Barton often praised Edward’s intelligence, and openly favoured him

over the others. Edward had been his first live-in pupil, and still lived upstairs, sharing a bedroom with Nigel, whom he had brought in later.

Nigel and Al carried Edward upstairs.

By the time their footsteps had faded away, Ben's breathing had calmed. The others helped him into a chair. "I only thought to scare them at first," he explained. "But then I could not stop gasping. I began to feel faint, and my extremities were numb."

"Numb, you say?" said Barton with some interest. "Tell me about the changes in detail. Nigel, record this."

"Nigel has gone upstairs," Clarence said.

"Why did he do that?"

"You told him to help carry Edward up there."

"I did? Well, before we record anything more, let us continue the dissection. Bring the cadaver to the table. Quickly!"

The secret door was still ajar. Clarence removed the catch from the winch handle. The heavy body descended until visible behind the fire door.

"Do not damage it. Lower it carefully."

Clarence wound the body down slowly, gripping the handle to prevent it spinning out of control under the weight of the load.

Barton was waiting at the base of the fireplace. Leaning in, he managed to land the bundle with both hands before tumbling in himself.

"Professor! Are you all right?" Clarence hurried towards him, letting go of the winch. The handle whirred and the full weight of the bundle fell onto Barton.

Despite some lingering grogginess, Ben lent Clarence a hand, and somehow the two of them heaved the bundle onto the dissecting table, closed the secret door, and moved the cupboard back into place. Al came downstairs to find them crouched over and gasping.

"How is Edward?" Barton asked him.

"He seems unharmed."

"Let him rest. I did not realize until today how weak my pupils were."

An anatomist had to be able to saw through bone. The work required considerable physical strength.

"Call Nigel down and have him begin drawing. Everyone else, assist me."

It was at that moment that Toby appeared to announce some new

visitors.

"Who? Never mind, I am busy now. Send them away."

"They are here on the magistrate's business, sir."

The pupils dived towards the bundle, but their visitors were already stepping into the room.

There were two of them. The first was dressed in the fashionable French *petit-maître* style, with large metal buttons across the breast of a black frock coat and a high-crowned hat, but it was clear from the person's figure as well as the features that this was a woman. The other was just as clearly a man: tall, broad-chested, and with a prominent jaw set with teeth that brought to mind a trapper's snare.

"Anne Moore," the woman said, offering her hand. Barton accepted it and brushed his lips against it as courtesy required, but his confusion was clear. "I am the assistant to the magistrate, Sir John Fielding."

It was ridiculous! How could a woman assist a magistrate? A position like that would mean regular contact with the worst sort of thieves, pickpockets, mountebanks, and murderers.

Indeed, it was only women of the lower classes, along with prostitutes, who worked at all, having no other choice. The lot of a young woman from a respectable family was to endure the tedium of sitting demurely at home.

But this woman did not appear to be of low birth, or indeed a prostitute. Was she some sort of virago?

"This is Dennis Abbott, my own assistant," the woman continued, indicating her companion, who seemed untalkative. "Is that your purchase from the grave-robbers?" The implausible visitor fanned the air before her nose with a handkerchief. "I am no stranger to the odour of death, but the air in this room is particularly foul."

"I have great respect for all that Justice Fielding has done to improve the safety of London," said Barton. "If I am not mistaken, my brother Robert also knows him socially. I must confess, however, that the news of women joining the Bow Street Runners had not reached me yet. And—"

At this point his pupils began to speak all at once, drowning out Barton's forthcoming observation that such a development was quite preposterous. None of them thought it advisable to start a quarrel at this point.

"It was my understanding," Barton went on, "that the magistrate took a

sympathetic view of my work."

She ignored him. "Open the bundle," she told Abbott.

Barton's pupils moved to stop him.

"It is merely a package of meat," said Clarence.

"A package of mort, perhaps," said Moore. "Open it."

"It is not fit for the eyes of a lady," said Barton, interposing himself between her and the object as his pupils stood guard over it.

"Very well," she replied. "Instead of opening it, I shall take it back to the magistrate's office in its present condition."

She cast a glance at her burly companion, who proceeded to push the others aside, take hold of the bundle, and sling it easily over one shoulder. Following Moore's lead, he then turned to leave, but Clarence, Ben, and Al clung to his waist, while Charlie got tangled in his legs, the second dose of ether just having worn off. Abbott lost his balance and dropped the wrapped object. Charlie, with flattened ears, scurried under the dissecting table, dragging his sutured leg.

"Be careful!" wailed Barton, clutching at his ginger hair. "Do not damage it! One does not come into possession of a six-months—ah… ah?!"

The bundle had fallen open, but the body inside belonged to a young man of no more than twenty. He was naked, but clothes were draped over him. Both of his arms had been amputated at the elbow, and both legs below the knee. The inner layers of the cloth itself were stiff with dried blood.

A protracted silence ensued.

"I thought the body looked small," said Barton finally, although his pupils once again tried to smother his voice, aware that, whatever was afoot, alluding to a second package containing Miss Roughhead certainly would not help matters.

"Who is this boy?" demanded Moore.

"I do not know," said Barton.

"Did you not buy him from the grave-robbers?"

"I am uncertain."

"Not grave-robbers, no," she mused. "They would have taken his clothing also. How did you come by this cadaver?"

No one replied.

"Remove the clothing," she said to Abbott.

The garments did not appear to belong to a man of the working class.

"Check for anything that might reveal his identity," she said.

"I fear it will not be a decent sight," objected Clarence. "He is not wearing any drawers."

Moore turned her stony gaze on him. Clarence shrank back.

"Nigel, sketch the cross-section of his stumps," ordered Barton.

"Nigel has gone to the privy," said Clarence. "He looked to have taken ill."

"Training to carve up corpses for a living, and a sight like this makes him ill?" asked Moore scornfully.

"You must excuse me also," said Edward, leaving the room with a hand over his mouth.

Abbott removed the clothing draped over the body.

"What in Heavens… ?"

The youth's chest was liberally smeared with a blue substance, as if someone had emptied an inkpot onto him. The blue had also seeped into the lining of the clothing that had concealed it.

Moore peered closely at the truncated, stained cadaver. "We have two problems combined here," she said, folding her arms. "This boy was clearly murdered, for which the magistrate's office must apprehend the culprit. And then there is the other body."

"Are you referring to a Miss Elaine Roughhead?" put in Clarence. "We were given to understand that her body was stolen." He faltered briefly under the stern gaze of this unlikeliest of magistrate's assistants, but continued nonetheless. "Our premises were thoroughly searched a little earlier by two constables who came here insisting that we must have her. We told them we knew nothing of the matter, but they would not believe us. They even disturbed the specimen room, which naturally disturbed us all as well."

Moore looked at Abbott. "Who is assigned to this street?" she asked.

"Hales and Bray, ma'am."

Her shoulders sagged slightly. It was Al who recognized that she, too, knew that the two policemen could be bribed, perhaps because it was Al who always did the bribing. "They came here?" she asked Clarence.

"A most uncivil and rough-mannered pair," he answered.

She turned to Abbott. "Did they report anything to you?"

He shook his head.

“Who is it claims to have sold Miss Roughhead’s remains to our school?” asked Clarence.

“We received information to that effect.”

“From whom?”

“The letter was anonymous, and the messenger boy who delivered it did not know the man who engaged his services. We shall look into the matter.”

At a signal from her, Abbott began searching the premises.

“Is this cupboard for hiding bodies in?” Moore asked.

“Certainly not,” said Clarence, shaking his head along with the others.

She opened the double doors. “Empty,” she observed.

“Is it against the law to leave a cupboard empty?” asked Clarence.

“Surely it merely gets in your way?… What is your name?”

“Spooner. Clarence Spooner.”

“I shall remember it. Loquacity is often employed to distract from a topic the speaker would rather not see examined too closely.”

“Clarence has always been loquacious,” said Al. “We call him ‘the Chatterbox.’”

“And your name is?”

“Be careful!” yelled Barton suddenly, watching Abbott stride around the neighbouring room. “Do not damage anything!”

“This body,” Moore said, returning her gaze to the dissecting table. “Was it obtained through illegal means?”

“Anatomists being denied sufficient material for our research, we have no alternative,” said Barton, compelled as usual to vent his spleen once the topic had come up. “Does Sir John not understand that knowledge of anatomy can help disclose the truth in criminal matters too? I would dearly have them change the law. If that were done, our clandestine dealings with felons would be eliminated at once.”

“We must respect the law. Ignore it, and there is disarray.” Her voice softened slightly. “Sir John recognizes, as do I, the benefits of anatomical knowledge in criminal investigations that you quite rightly proclaim. For this reason, we overlook whatever use men such as yourself might find for the bodies of itinerants expiring by the road and others of that nature. Similarly, though the law frowns upon the purchase of cadavers from the poor, we do not pursue such matters in the absence of complaints from

anyone involved. But the theft of the mortal remains of a daughter of the Roughhead family cannot be dismissed so quietly, and when someone is murdered as cruelly as was this boy here, we must do all we can to discover the culprit."

Returning from his search of the specimen room, Abbott reported that he had found nothing.

"Please search the entire building," she told him. "The second floor also."

"Allow me to be your guide," said Al.

Before he could go, she asked, "What is your name?"

"Albert Wood, madam."

"I shall remember it."

"I keep many valuable things in my study," said Barton. "Al, watch this fellow closely and make sure he does not manhandle them more than is necessary."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Abbott, the dining room and kitchen account for the rest of the ground floor, beyond what you can see. There is a cellar below, partly used for storing coal. Finally, the doorkeeper's quarters are beside the entrance. Will you examine every room?"

"Of course he will," said Moore.

Al led Abbott towards the students' dissection area.

"Other anatomists also seek cadavers for teaching purposes," Clarence pressed on. "Why not continue your search for the remains of Miss Roughhead with them? Whatever tales those constables claim to have heard from the grave-robbers were evidently fabricated. They came hoping for a bribe, perhaps, but found nothing and left disappointed."

"Our search for Miss Roughhead may proceed elsewhere. However, with regard to this young amputee a separate investigation is indicated. Mr. Barton, your source for this cadaver, if you please?"

"Some grave-robbers brought him in," Clarence interrupted, not leaving time for Barton to answer.

"Gobbin and Dick?"

"No, other fellows unknown to us. Our research calls for as many cadavers as we can obtain. Mr. Barton was not aware of the transaction. His time is devoted entirely to research. It is we, his pupils, who supply him with the raw materials he requires."

"You bought the cadaver knowing that it was in this condition, then."

"No. We did not open the bundle."

"When was it delivered?"

"This morning, soon after dawn."

"Why did you not begin dissection immediately? It is summer, when things quickly decay."

Clarence pointed at the young draughtsman just now emerging from the lavatory. "*He* was feeling unwell." Nigel's face was, indeed, the very image of malaise. Edward returned with him.

"During dissections," Clarence continued, "he sketches the procedure, to record organic structures."

"I see," said Moore, looking at Nigel. "And your name is?"

"Nigel Hart, madam."

"I shall remember it." She turned back to Clarence. "You were saying?"

"When he had recovered enough to work and we were about to begin, the two Bow Street Runners arrived, so in haste we hid the body."

"Where?"

Al and Abbott now reappeared, the latter shaking his head when he met Moore's gaze, before following Al upstairs.

"In that cupboard," said Clarence. "The constables turned even the specimen room upside down, but it did not seem to occur to them to open the cupboard. Foolish of them, surely?… Well, I suppose there was the distraction of Ben almost dying, too." Noting her interest, he continued: "Ben was leaning against the cupboard, and they pushed him violently out of the way. He collapsed, with palpitations, whereupon the two of them withdrew, recognizing the gravity of what they had done. We attended to Ben, and, once the episode had passed, retrieved the package. Just as we were about to open it, however, we were interrupted by your arrival with Mr. Abbott… . Perhaps you saw your two men as you made your way here?"

"We did not."

"Of course, we had no idea that the cadaver was in this condition. We are all, I assure you, dumbfounded."

Moore looked at Nigel. "Your drawing-book, please," she said.

A wave of anxiety swept through the room. As Barton's pupils very

well knew, the drawing-book would contain meticulous renderings of a womb revealed by an X-shaped incision in a female abdomen.

"It is on the second floor," said Nigel. "I shall retrieve it at once." His voice quivered slightly under Moore's unyielding stare, as did his legs.

"The second floor?" she asked. "Were you not just about to begin drawing when we interrupted you?"

"I begin a new drawing-book with each new dissection. The one for today is still unused. I shall show you a previous one."

Nigel crossed to the foot of the stairs.

"Al!" he called. "Bring my last drawing-book with you when you come down."

"All right," came Al's voice from above.

"Given your acknowledgement, earlier, that anatomical knowledge is useful to criminal investigations," said Clarence, not missing an opportunity when he saw one, "I assume that you will not consider our purchase worth further scrutiny."

"The purchase itself I shall overlook," she said. "However, I shall require Mr. Barton's assistance with the criminal investigation."

"With pleasure," Barton replied, finally permitted by his pupils to speak. "Everything we learn from this dissection shall be conveyed to the magistrate's office. To that end, you will kindly allow us to begin as soon as possible. Not a minute can be wasted. The process of putrefaction is under way."

"We wish the Bow Street Runners every success in their endeavours," said Clarence grandly. "But the work of identifying corpses and pursuing criminals is scarcely appropriate for students of anatomy like ourselves."

Al and Abbott tramped back down the stairs, the former with an armful of drawing-books.

As soon as the first was opened, Anne's eyes widened. "Nigel Hart," she said, "you are a prodigy."

The other pupils concurred.

"I do my best to be accurate," came Nigel's quiet voice among the chorus.

"When I publish my book on anatomy, I intend to have his work made into engravings for it," said Barton proudly. "No man pursuing a career in medicine will want to be without the result."

Even the impassive Abbott was staring at Nigel with undisguised admiration.

"This is the cranium and the brain stem," said Barton, pointing. He turned the page. "This is a sketch of the liver's blood vessels. Nigel has the makings of a Leonardo. This is the dorsal musculature. A truly remarkable rendering, you must admit—Michelangelo would not have been ashamed of it. Exposing the fascia is much more tiresome a task than the uninitiated might imagine."

On this theme, Barton's verbosity put even Clarence's to shame.

"One peels back the skin, then picks out the fat until the fascia come into view," he continued. "Painstaking, yes. Muscles are not the spindle-shaped things you might imagine from the sight of a strong man's arms, but thin, flat cords. The unwanted fat is discarded in that bucket. Charlie, my dog, disposes of it."

Charlie raised his sad eyes and wagged his tail at the sound of his name.

"But that's monstrous!" said Moore.

"The human form is truly a work of art," Barton went on, failing to even notice the disgust in her voice. "Its beauty never fails to move me."

Recovering her businesslike manner, Moore opened another drawing-book. "This, I believe, is a foetus in the final month of gestation," she said pointedly.

"The mother died immediately before birth," Barton informed her. "We were notified at once by her family, from whom we acquired the body."

"A woman of the poorer classes, then. Might not the family member who notified you have murdered her for the money?"

"Our dissection revealed no evidence of that. The cause of death was dysentery arising from her insanitary surroundings."

"Are there no ways of killing someone without its being discovered by dissection?"

"No doubt there are. To learn more, the science of anatomy must be further refined."

"But not at the expense of a life."

"Most certainly not. Now, let us get on with this dissection."

"Anatomical diagrams of pregnant women would be of great value to midwives and the like, I suppose."

"Of course. These drawings must be made into engravings and widely

distributed. Indeed, one of my dearest wishes is to publish a medical text illustrating pregnancy at every stage, from the earliest days to the moments before birth, based on a thorough analysis of the topic."

"I imagine the body of a woman six months pregnant would be most instructive for that purpose."

Barton's quick-witted pupils intervened before he could spring the trap she had laid. First, Clarence pretended to stumble in order to kick the bucket under the table. Charlie, who viewed the bucket as his own possession, bolted after it, attracting Moore's eye as Clarence had hoped. The bucket rolled towards Al, who casually changed its course with a nudge from the toe of his shoe. Tumbling together, Charlie and the bucket collided with Abbott's long shins.

Although Barton did not realize that this brief ruckus was for his benefit, it did give him time to prepare more of his discourse.

"Once expired, the human body differs in no wise from a lower animal's," he said. "Interred in earth, it rots pointlessly away. God receives the soul, which is enough to satisfy Him. But the body can be used to advance medical science. The Church and the government must take the lead in educating the public so that all recognize the good in this. You are interfering with important work. Pray be so kind as to leave. I will make a full report of what we learn by examining this amputee."

Abbott sat down on the stairs, coolly rubbing his shins as Charlie gazed with mournful eyes at the mark he and the bucket had left on them. No doubt he realized that there would be no titbits for him from these particular limbs.

"This ointment is effective for bruises," said Nigel, offering Abbott a jar. Abbott took it respectfully, much as a servant would from his master.

"Use about this much," Nigel instructed, reaching to scoop out some of the contents with his fingers, but Abbott stopped him.

"Those deft hands of yours should be saved for drawing, not something as unimportant as this."

"Nigel Hart," said Moore. "I should like to confirm one thing. When we arrived, a dissection was about to begin. Naturally, I assume that you had a drawing-book ready. Where is that drawing-book?"

"As I said earlier, I had not yet drawn anything in it."

"A blank book will do—show it to me."

“I must warn you that it is soiled.”

“Soiled before even being used?”

“Please wait here.”

Nigel disappeared into the lavatory. He emerged holding, between two fingers, a wet drawing-book with apparent distaste.

“I was carrying it with me when I excused myself earlier. Some of what I brought up spilled upon it. I washed that off, but the book is far from clean.”

“Never mind.” She leafed through it carefully before returning it. Nigel looked relieved.

“The first few pages are torn out, I observe,” she noted sternly.

“I made use of them to keep the floor and walls clean, then discarded them.”

“I can vouch for it,” put in Edward in his well-bred way. “I, too, felt ill and used the same privy. I did not wish to mention it in a lady’s presence, but I made use of Nigel’s book as well.”

There was a groan from Barton. Nigel’s illustrations had been ruined.

“What made the two of you so queasy?” asked Moore, pressing on. “Surely you are accustomed to unpleasant sights.”

“Well, I had just—” began Edward, then swallowed his words. If he spoke of having fainted, the secret door and the winch might be discovered.

“Perhaps it was something you ate,” offered Al. “What did you and Nigel have yesterday evening?”

“I made a posset of sack and milk,” said Nigel. “We also bought some cold meat at the market.”

“There you are!” Clarence snapped his fingers. “Either the milk or meat had spoilt. That explains why both of you felt unwell all morning.”

“But this is serious,” said a shocked Barton. “I shall prescribe a digestive for you at once.”

“No, there is no need,” said Nigel. “I feel much better after discharging whatever it was.”

“Bad meat is not to be trifled with.”

“Show me the paper you used to catch the egestion,” ordered Moore.

“I threw it on the dust-heap outside.”

“Then go and retrieve it.”

“I am afraid the dust-man has already removed it.”

“Abbott, check the privy and dust-heap. Mr. Barton, I shall report the discovery of this corpse to the magistrate. Please examine it closely and confirm the cause of death. Was it the amputation of his limbs that killed him, or were they severed after he died? And what occasioned such cruel abuse?”

Nigel’s lips went pale. Edward propped him up as he began to sway.

Once Moore and Abbott had departed, taking as evidence the clothing that covered the youth, Barton and the rest of his pupils followed Nigel’s lead and slumped onto whatever resting place was to hand.

“I wonder who tipped off the magistrate about us buying the six-monther,” Clarence said from the floor.

“Toby?” suggested Ben.

“What do you think, Edward?”

Edward shook his head. “If Toby was going to turn us in, he would have done so long ago.”

“But the reward for a baronet’s daughter would be high.”

“If it was for the bounty, why make the tip anonymously?”

“The grave-robbers may have let something slip,” said Al.

The Professor was the first to rise to his feet. “Edward, Nigel,” he said. “Where *did* you hide the girl? You were the ones who carried the bundle to the fireplace.”

They exchanged a glance. Then Edward picked up a coil of flat rope and handed it to Al.

“When I give the signal, pull on it,” he said.

“Pull on it?” repeated Clarence. “Oh—that’s where you hid it?”

Edward and Nigel nodded.

“So it was also you two who attached this one”—Clarence indicated the limbless youth on the dissecting table—“to the hook.”

“Yes.”

“Did you dispatch the boy and use the winch to hide him behind the fire door?”

“The answer to the first part of your question is no,” said Edward. “The answer to the second part is yes.”

“You hid the woman in the other place because the hook was in use?”

“Correct.”

“The other place?” echoed Barton. Edward and Nigel leaned forward

into the fireplace. Noticing the confusion on Barton's face, Clarence explained how the fireplace was constructed, tracing the outline of the baffle and fire door on the floor.

"So it is deeper than I thought," said Barton.

"We did not realize it ourselves until we were installing the winch. If we had known, we could have just used this hiding place instead of knocking through the wall and adding the winch. But we were already more than half-way done, and the spot in the fireplace is rather awkward for moving bodies in and out of—too deep, and because of the baffle too cramped."

"So we decided to finish our own project, too," said Ben.

"According to our erudite Edward," added Al, "this kind of fireplace is a more efficient design, invented by Prince Rupert."

Prince Rupert of the Rhine, a nephew of Charles I, had been an admiral in the Royal Navy during the Anglo-Dutch wars of a century and more before. A superb commander, he had also been an ingenious inventor, improving the design of firearms and involving himself in the development of the mezzotint printmaking process—not least as an artist. He had also introduced "Prince Rupert's drops" to England—pieces of tear-shaped glass that aroused scientific curiosity by resisting even the blow of a hammer to their bulbous portion yet shattering at the slightest insult to their tail.

"He reformed the humble fireplace too?"

"He certainly did," said Clarence, as proudly as if the invention had been his own. "Prince Rupert's innovation was adding a baffle at the back of the firebox, with a hinged upper part that can be moved back and forth. Whilst the fire is being started, the upper part is pushed back, to allow smoke to go directly up the flue. Once the fire has caught, the baffle is pulled to the forward position, forcing the smoke to take the long way around, descending to pass under the baffle before it rises—which helps keep the smoke out of the room. He invented this mechanism at about the time of the Great Fire of London, so I imagine a fair number were installed during the rebuilding afterwards. Of course, more efficient designs have been invented since. Ours is in fact quite old-fashioned—it has not been replaced or modified since it was built a century ago."

All this Clarence had learned from Edward, and he cheerfully admitted as much.

"Whichever position the hinged part is in, those unfamiliar with the

design would have no reason to suspect that the baffle ends part-way down, leaving a large space open at the bottom of the flue. What's more, our fireplace seems to have a particularly deep space there—certainly deeper than in the diagram Edward saw in a book."

"To think that this building has over a century of history!" said Barton with feeling. "My brother bought it just ten years ago. Certain facilities have been improved here and there, but not the fireplace, it seems."

They heard Edward's voice from inside the flue say, "Now, pull her out."

Al, Ben, and Clarence pulled on the rope together. The bundle began to emerge, but as it showed a tendency to catch in the narrow opening between the baffle and the front wall of the flue, Nigel and Edward had to push it up from below as well. Pushing and pulling as Barton watched anxiously, the five of them finally got it out.

The winch, they all agreed, was much easier.

"Let the rope go," called Edward.

"They must need it to climb out," said Clarence. "I told you it was deep." He untied the rope from around the bundle. While Al and Ben fed the rope into the fireplace again, he and the Professor laid the limbless youth on the floor and replaced him on the dissecting table with the other body.

When Al and Ben pulled on the rope again, they found that they had pulled out, not their companions, but yet another corpse.

"What's this, then?" asked Ben after a startled pause.

"It was at the bottom of the flue," came Edward's voice.

When Edward and Nigel climbed out, they were as sooty as a pair of chimney-sweeps.

The new cadaver was deposited on the floor. It was a man, and quite naked.

The smell in the room had got worse.

"He has no face!"

The dead man's head was still where it belonged. But his face had been damaged beyond all recognition.

Chapter 2

After a journey of one hundred and thirty miles in a jolting stage-coach, seventeen-year-old Nathan Cullen had arrived in London ready to collapse.

It was almost April, but the weather was midwinter cold. Eyes watering in the blustery wind, he saw buildings black with grime; cobblestone streets pockmarked with holes that had been filled in with scrap lumber and packed straw; and an astonishing amount of traffic moving through it all—carriages drawn by six or eight horses, gigs drawn by just one, butchers' wagons, night soil barrows, water carriers, street merchants, and sedan chair teams shoving pedestrians aside as they hurried through the throng.

The sedan chairs were something Nathan had never seen before, but he recognized at once how much more nimbly they progressed on the crowded streets than the horse-drawn carriages around them. They were essentially enclosed cabins on a pair of long, rail-like poles, with two men, one fore and one aft, using the poles to carry the conveyance from place to place. The poles also had leather thongs threaded through hooks, which the chairmen wore around their shoulders for extra support.

The clatter of carriage wheels, the warning cries of the sedan chair teams, the sales pitches bellowed by stall-holders, and the ringing of small bells on the gingerbread woman's push-cart all combined into one discordant sound, and smoke from countless chimneys darkened the sky.

After the Great Fire had reduced London to ash and debris in 1666, the city's wooden buildings had been replaced by rows of brick houses. The effect might have been attractive at first, but, over the intervening century, every wall and roof had accumulated a layer of soot. The dawn of the Industrial Revolution around 1760 had not helped matters.

Nathan's clothes still bore the marks of his journey, but, as he stood watching, the air left grains of soot on them, too. It got into his throat and made him cough.

Placing his portmanteau at his feet, he leaned against a bridge's railing. The Thames was as brown as sewage, and smelled the part too. On the river were flat-bottomed boats rowed by four-man teams, larger vessels crewed by sailors hired by the day, fishing boats, and barges. Local people preferring to be ferried across descended stone steps to a landing place, where Nathan could hear ferrymen shout "Grab the whore" at them. In

broad daylight! On second thoughts, however, he realized that they were only telling their passengers to grab the *oar*.

The stench of the river must have been something one grew accustomed to. The banks were roamed by ragged children picking through the mud and silt: bottles, jars, hats, umbrellas, bits of rope, lumber, even coins and watches—any useful litter that fell or was thrown off a bridge or boat was added to their collection.

Nathan asked a passer-by for directions, showing him the address he had been given. Not bothering to hide his disrespect, the man shrugged and jerked his thumb behind him, almost directly back towards where Nathan had just alighted from the carriage. He prodded at Nathan's luggage with his foot as he walked on.

This made the buckles of the portmanteau, packed to overflowing, abruptly give way. The bag flew open and disgorged its contents everywhere, from shirts to underclothes, making Nathan scramble to retrieve it all rather than remonstrate. At least his papers had been secured with a cord. If his precious writings had blown into the river, he would have been tempted to throw himself in after them.

Nobody offered him any assistance. He was ignored at best, and a few tittered as they passed.

Finally, he had stuffed everything back in the bag. He sat on the bulging lid to close the buckles again, then picked it up and set off in the direction that the man, however impolitely, had indicated.

Crossing back over the bridge, he let his feet wander where they would.

Soon he came to a square. Women crowded around a row of grocers' stalls, baskets on their arm. The sales cries here were just as loud. In another part of the square he saw a series of butchers' stalls, where men hacked at ribs with greasy cleavers and kicked at the stray dogs that roamed the area.

He was relieved to catch sight of a church tower. A man of the cloth would give him the correct directions without sneering at him. Back in his village, it had been the parish priest who had discerned his talent and made it possible for him to come to London.

Stepping inside, he thought for a moment he had entered the wrong building. This looked like a bawdy-house!

He averted his eyes and withdrew. "Right lost, little lamb, ain't you?" a

woman in too much paint and powder to be a housewife called out to him. False beauty spots dotted her cheeks, and her neckline was so low that her ample breasts seemed on the verge of spilling out.

Being a pious Christian, Nathan felt obliged again to look away as he asked her for directions.

She laughed, showing blackened teeth. “Shoreditch, is it? Just over that way.” She pointed behind the church. Nathan could not help seeing her swelling bosom when she made the gesture.

He took the road she had indicated and found that it led to the church’s graveyard.

Standing among the many gravestones, he offered a brief prayer for the souls of these unknown dead. A chill wind nipped at his neck. He noticed how the little drops at the tip of a weeping willow’s branches had turned gold, and realized that the day was near its end.

Two gravestones stood on either side of him: one buried in the grass as if forgotten, the other brand-new, with flowers laid beside it.

The graveyard was a peaceful place. But he could not allow himself to rest; his goals in life prevented it, reminding him that he had only just set out on the path he hoped would lead to fame.

He sensed that he was not alone. Though doing nothing wrong, he backed away all the same.

Partly silhouetted against the setting sun, two figures approached the fresh grave and placed a bouquet of their own before it. Both of them looked slightly older than him.

Noticing Nathan, the two froze for a moment.

“Are you family?” the taller one asked him, pointing at the grave. Were they not family themselves, then?

Nathan shook his head. They smiled and, with a wave, turned to leave.

“Wait!” he said. “I have a question.”

Looking wary, the two exchanged a glance.

“About what?” asked the taller one.

“The way to Shoreditch,” said Nathan.

They seemed relieved.

“It is quite a walk from here,” said the smaller one.

“Two, two and a half miles, I’d say,” the other nodded. “Do you have an address?”

Nathan recited the address he had memorized. “I am to call on a Mr. Barrett,” he added.

“Not an acquaintance of ours, but no matter,” said the smaller fellow. He pulled out a scrap of paper and quickly sketched a map on it. “Your address should be hereabouts,” he said, marking an intersection where two roads met, Shoreditch High Street and Folgate Street. He handed the map over, then glanced at the bag at Nathan’s feet. “Going straight there?” he asked.

“After travelling?” asked the other.

“Yes,” said Nathan.

“From where?”

“Sherbourne.” He realized suddenly that he was famished. “Is there anywhere nearby where one might dine cheaply?”

They glanced at each other again.

“We were just about to sup ourselves,” said the smaller one finally. “Would you care to join us?”

“I cannot afford anything costly.”

“Then we have something in common already.”

Oxtail stew, eightpence a bowl. The dish was no better than the low price it commanded, but on an empty stomach it was delicious. Black bread and beer completed the meal. Starting tomorrow, Nathan would have to be more frugal. He would live on bread and water.

His beer mug was soon empty. He filled it again.

Despite the lit candles in the place, it was quite dim inside.

“What business did you have in that graveyard?” asked Edward.

The three had exchanged names by this point. Edward Turner and Nigel Hart: the first people to show him any kindness since his arrival in this cold city. Nathan stored their names away inside him.

“I asked someone the way to Shoreditch. Their directions led me to the graveyard instead. A joke—at my expense!” The beer and stew had Nathan in high spirits. “They shall regret it soon enough.”

“Oh?”

“D’you doubt me? Before long, having shared a meal with me shall be a point of pride for you.”

“A big inheritance coming, perhaps?”

“God forbid! Do you approve of the rich?”

“Not particularly,” said Edward, smiling indulgently to calm the other’s agitation. “But better to have money than to lack it, surely?”

“Oh, I shall make enough,” said Nathan confidently. “But such is not my goal. A poet does not write for money. If his work is well received, sales will inevitably follow.”

“You are a poet?” asked Nigel.

“I am. I have already written enough to fill a book.” He pointed proudly at his bag. “Tomorrow I take the manuscript to Tyndale.”

“Tyndale?”

“The name is unfamiliar to you? He prints and sells books.”

“My word!”

Nathan basked in their admiration.

“Will you read us something?”

“Here? Now?”

“The customers here are quite civilized,” said Nigel. “The uncultured and the immoral do not patronize this place. Neither, it must be admitted, do the high-born, but many of the regular patrons have some intellectual pretensions—students of the law, aspiring writers, and so on. Of course, more than a few are quite objectionable. In any case, some read their work aloud here.”

Nathan opened his portmanteau and produced a sheaf of papers.

“What is the book?” asked Nigel, noticing as he peered into the bag that the papers had lain on top of a volume bound in leather.

“A treatise on heraldry,” said Nathan. “My parish priest gave it to me. I had wanted it for some time, so he made it a parting gift.”

“Looks interesting,” said Edward, picking it up. Nathan was slightly put out to see him show more apparent interest in a rare book than any poetry recital. It made him suddenly lose confidence. To be criticized by the ignorant in a place like this had no appeal at all.

“Let us leave aside the poetry,” he said weakly. “… Did that grave belong to someone you were close to?”

The two of them gave non-committal replies.

Feeling the conversation flag, Nathan lowered his voice and tried to regain their interest. “I am carrying something of great value,” he said.

“You mean this book?” Edward asked, leafing through it.

“No.”

“Jewellery, perhaps?”

“No. But precious all the same. Publishers will beg for it.”

Edward and Nigel raised their index fingers to their lips.

“Better not to mention it even in here.”

“You never know who might be listening. London is a dangerous town.”

“There are footpads and cutpurses at large, and even armed robbery is not unheard of. If you’re headed for Shoreditch, you had better make a start.”

“The Bow Street Runners have mounted patrols, but they can’t be everywhere. Just dealing with the crimes reported to them must keep their hands full.”

They explained who the Bow Street Runners were.

“Prime Ministers, Lord Mayors—even the Crown Prince. No one is safe.”

“The bands of thieves are brazen. They once posted notices on the front doors of the rich: ‘Let no person, of whatever quality or condition, go out of town without ten guineas and a watch about them.’”

“Why, that’s virtually a toll!” Nathan laughed to conceal a certain trepidation.

“The roads are getting dark. Be careful.”

“Think of yourself as a soldier sent into battle,” Edward warned him.

“One hears of people beaten senseless and waking up at sea.”

“At sea?”

“The Navy press-gangs new recruits.”

“With the wrong luck, you might even be shipped off to the colonies in the New World.”

Nathan was now genuinely alarmed.

“We must be off,” said Edward. He and Nigel stood up.

“Can I see you again?” asked Nathan, wishing he sounded less pathetic.

“If you’re in Shoreditch, not very often.”

“I shall visit Mr. Tyndale tomorrow. His shop is—let me think—in a part called Covent Garden.”

“Which is where we are at present. What is the address?”

Nathan told him.

“Tomorrow, we shall probably finish our work not long after four,” said

Edward. “Then we retire to a coffee-house. You are welcome to join us there.”

“‘Matthew’s,’ beside the Covent Garden Theatre,” added Nigel. “Facing a small square with a fountain. Let me have that paper again.”

He turned it over and drew a map of how to reach the coffee-house, adding a rough sketch of the area around Tyndale’s shop for good measure.

Nathan offered Edward the book of heraldry. “If we are to meet again tomorrow, would you care to borrow this?” he asked. “You seem to have an interest in the subject.” His unease at lending such a valuable book to someone he had just met was outweighed by his determination to cement this unexpected new friendship.

“Are you sure?” asked Edward.

“Provided you return it tomorrow,” said Nathan.

“Of course.”

“Might I ask what interests you about heraldry?”

“The same thing as you, I imagine. I take an interest in anything rare and unusual.”

“So you have an inquiring mind.”

“Not unlike yourself, apparently.”

“Yes, although it does depend on the topic.”

“I should also like to see this valuable thing you say will be of great interest to publishers,” said Edward.

After a moment’s thought, Nathan replied, “I shall lend you the book, but save the other for tomorrow.” This, he calculated, would encourage Edward to keep his promise.

As they were leaving the public house, a drunkard rather generously insisted on treating the three of them to some gin. Edward and Nigel smoothly brushed him off, but Nathan was less successful and drank what he was offered, which felt like fire in his belly.

Parting from the other two, he set out for Shoreditch.

The road was already a channel of darkness. The street lamps were dim and sparsely placed, but to Nathan they shone like lighthouses along the way. His pace quickened as he headed from one light to the next. The globes of glass were attached to pillars or hung from rods protruding from the walls, but most were so grimy that the flickering wick inside was of doubtful value.

Nathan came upon a lamplighter using a pulley to raise one of the globes again after lighting it. The gin had begun to take effect; he lost his balance and stumbled into the man, who cursed and flung some oil on him.

He opened his mouth to protest, but the lamplighter's dark, hostile face made him hurry away, as if nothing had happened.

Groups of women in bright but patched clothing began to gather in the pools of light, some calling out to him.

He stepped knee-deep in a dunghill and was sprayed by a chamber pot emptied out of a second-floor window. Leaving the main commercial district and the comfort of fires set by tramps and whores by the side of the road to warm themselves, he found himself in an area lit only by the stars and occasional lanterns at the gates of the larger houses.

He began to worry. Would he wander aimlessly all night? Have to sleep outdoors?

Passing into an area where houses stood like crooked teeth between vacant lots, he saw a sign with street names on it at a crossroads. Made of two crossed wooden boards, the sign was just barely legible in the starlight: one board read Shoreditch, the other Folgate. He blew the sign a kiss.

It took him another twenty minutes to find the nameplate reading T. Barrett. He felt as if icicles were forming inside him in the biting cold.

Beyond the front door was a space that served as both kitchen and dining room. Nathan introduced himself to Barrett, a man slouched in a makeshift chair resting a bottle on his round belly. Behind him a woman stood washing dishes in the sink.

Barrett looked at him blearily. "So you're Nathan Cullen, eh?" he asked.

"We had a letter from your mother," said the woman. "I'm her cousin. You can call me Mrs. Barrett. Welcome." But there was little welcome in her eyes as she offered him her damp hand.

Three children were at her feet, squalling and pulling each other's hair.

"Your room's made up in the attic," Mrs. Barrett told him. "First, let's be clear about the arrangement. Rent is two shillings fourpence a week. Meals not included. Cook or buy your own; you can use the stove in the kitchen when it's free. The coal to heat your room is charged separately. If water's boiled, you're free to use it—for tea, I mean. Hot water for washing in is extra. When you do use any water, be sure to fetch some more. For your mother's sake, you're getting a very reasonable price. Even an attic

room in a rookery goes for three shillings a week, and if you want to live somewhere nice, you'll pay eight at least."

Nathan didn't say a word.

"First two weeks' rent in advance," Mrs. Barrett added.

Taking a live coal or two for his stove, Nathan climbed up to the attic. It was as cold there as it had been outside. He lit the stove. There was no bed; instead, a straw mattress lay on some boards placed across the beams of the ceiling below. He noticed a piece of cloth stuffed into one of the walls; when he removed it briefly, a blast of chill wind came in through a hole leading directly outside. The Barretts, he realized, had not wanted to pay the window tax, and had simply extracted a few bricks. In summer the hole would probably let in a cooling breeze along with the moonlight.

Nathan collected himself and opened his portmanteau.

There was his treasure, safely inside.

The following morning, Nathan put on the new shirt he had been saving for this day, along with a jacket and a pair of breeches in relatively good condition. He polished his shoes to a respectable sheen, gathered up his prized possession—a sheaf of parchment—together with his own poetry, and descended to the kitchen. Mr. Barrett was already at the gin.

The children's tussle of last night seemed to have continued unabated.

"Shut up!" cried Barrett. "Here—this'll give us some peace and quiet."

Nathan watched as the man poured some gin into his children's mouths.

"Good morning," he said.

Barrett nodded. His wife sighed.

"There's oatmeal if you want it," she told him. "For threepence."

Nathan declined the offer and left the house.

Shoreditch looked even shabbier in the light of morning. Nathan made his way back up the road he had taken the night before, the sounds around him getting louder as he approached the livelier parts of town.

There were push-carts and stalls piled high with wares close to the river. "Steamed dumplings!" cried the itinerant vendors. "Sharp'ning! Sharp'ning done cheap!" "Brooms! Get yer brooms here!" Chimney-sweeps moved through the crowds, tired boys black from head to toe.

Nathan breakfasted on a bowl of frumenty bought at one of the stalls. Just wheat boiled in milk with a pinch of sugar added, it was nevertheless

far more appetizing than the charred oatmeal stuck to the bottom of Mrs. Barrett's pan.

He came to a square he felt he had seen before. Consulting Nigel's map, he crossed to the other side in search of Tyndale's bookshop. Still frowning at the map, he walked straight into a sign sticking out on the pavement; looking up, he realized that this was the very place he was looking for.

A few fine leather-bound volumes were on display in the window, but these were not for sale. The shop's wares were all on tables and shelves inside, still in the form of unbound or temporarily bound signatures. Once a customer decided that a book took his fancy, he would have the shop bind it for him properly.

Towards the back of the place, Nathan could see someone leafing through a temporarily bound book at a reading desk. He looked like a wealthy merchant, perhaps in his late forties. Because bookbinding was expensive, it was quite usual for customers to peruse a book's contents before placing an order. In some cases they were even permitted to take copies home to read. For bibliophiles, however, mere reading did not exhaust a book's value: to display it as a splendid leather-bound volume in their library was a further purpose.

A middle-aged man stood before a bookshelf, tidying the signatures. Nathan made his presence known, and the man looked his way. "What is it you want?" he asked discouragingly. His face was weak and pinched, which only made his curved nose more prominent.

"My name is Nathan Cullen. I wish to see Mr. Tyndale. Do I have the pleasure?"

"Mr. Tyndale is in his office. What is it about?"

"Please convey to him that I have arrived. I am sure he will see me. My parish priest sent a letter of introduction in advance."

"Nathan—what was it again?"

"Cullen."

The man huffed, before disappearing somewhere at the back of the shop.

Did he actually intend to summon Tyndale, or not? Nathan waited anxiously, taking a signature from the shelf. This one hadn't even a temporary binding. The title was in French: *Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*. The author, one Antoine François Prévost

d'Exiles, was familiar even to Nathan. He had once been ordained, and so was sometimes simply called the Abbé Prévost. Nathan remembered the time an adult had caught him at the age of seven or eight reading *Moll Flanders*, a book by someone widely considered Prévost's peer, Daniel Defoe. The person had slapped Nathan so hard that later his face was swollen. *Moll Flanders* was the tale of a woman born in prison, who married five times in a series of attempts to enter the ranks of fashionable society. One of those marriages had been to her own brother by blood; the man she truly loved was a thief; and she too became well known for breaking the law, eventually being thrown into prison and becoming even more notorious there.

Nathan's education had included reading and writing in French, but at the moment his eyes could only follow the words without absorbing a thing. All he could think of was the prospect of someone buying this volume, having it put in some sumptuous binding—morocco leather, perhaps, or shagreen—and placing it on a massive bookshelf. It was exciting to imagine his own poetry being printed and put up for sale here to receive the same treatment.

Just then, he heard angry voices outside. Drawing closer to the window, he peered out to see two chairmen, still bearing a sedan chair, arguing with a pedestrian. Nathan could not be sure of the cause of the disagreement, but every chairman he had seen so far was a rough sort of character, barging people out of the way as they went.

The pedestrian—who presumably had been sent flying—approached the man at the front and jabbed him in the chest.

The latter signalled to the fellow behind, and the two of them charged forward, ramming the pedestrian's chest with the end of one pole.

Nathan saw the curtains in the window of the chair itself sway, and heard a woman scream from inside. Their passenger was still on board.

Swinging his walking stick, the pedestrian then smashed the window.

Sedan chairs were delicately made to keep them light. The whole chair fell to pieces at this single blow, pitching a woman, whose dress suggested not inconsiderable social standing, into the street.

At once, Nathan dashed outside. There, he helped her up and led her back into Tyndale's shop.

By now the chairmen had pushed the pedestrian against a wall, looping

the leather thongs on their poles around his neck and shoulders. This kept him pinned in place as one of them kneed him repeatedly in the crotch, while the other, who had let go of his end of the poles so that their weight was borne entirely by their victim, moved in with a club. Sinking down, the pedestrian managed to seize the first man's ankles and heave him up and over backwards just as several burly officials rode on horseback through the gathering crowd. These, Nathan assumed, must be the Bow Street Runners Edward and Nigel had mentioned.

Inside the shop, the man at the reading desk was still engrossed in his book. He gave no sign of having noticed the commotion at all.

Abruptly, two men emerged from the back room. One was the unfriendly employee; the other was plump, wore a pince-nez, and was approximately half-way to being completely bald.

"Madam!"

"What happened?"

The young woman's taffeta dress was torn. It was customary for women to faint in situations like these, emphasizing their fragility, but she sat calmly on a nearby chair.

"My usual chairmen being ill, I made the error of engaging the services of two I found at a crossroads," she explained.

"You came without even a servant to accompany you? That will never do!" cried Pince-nez, waving his hands about.

"I was anxious to make haste," she told him, "after hearing that the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* had arrived."

"It has indeed, madam," said Pince-nez. "A copy was finally included in our latest shipment from France, and so I took the liberty of dispatching a messenger boy to your residence. The book is selling so briskly that it has been reprinted yet again, it seems. The Abbé Prévost may have passed on several years ago, but the popularity of his work has not waned—especially with younger members of the fairer sex."

"May I see the book, Mr. Tyndale?"

"Of course, of course. It was to fulfil your order that we obtained it, after all. I fear that it is still in signatures, however, without even a temporary binding." He rummaged through the shelves. "Of course, one's concern about what your excellent parents might think of your reading such

an unwholesome romance cannot be entirely… I was quite sure that I put it here. Let me see…"

The unfriendly clerk picked up some papers scattered on the floor and handed them to Tyndale.

"Whatever was it doing on the floor? Was this your doing, Farrow?"

"Absolutely not. I am well aware of its value as the only copy in our possession. Mr. Evans, over there, is clearly absorbed in Robinson Crusoe's tale of life on a desert island; he has not moved from his chair. It was this youth here." The clerk—Farrow—jabbed his finger at Nathan. "It can only have been his doing. Upon my oath, he is to blame!"

Nathan had to admit that Farrow was quite correct. Seeing a young woman in danger, he had cast aside the papers he was holding in order to run to her aid.

Mr. Evans, the other customer, now abandoned Crusoe's island long enough to glance at Nathan and the girl.

Tyndale adjusted his pince-nez and peered at Nathan. "And who are you?" he demanded.

"Nathan Cullen, sir. This man should have announced me earlier."

"I did not think his arrival from God knows where worth mentioning to you at such a busy time," Farrow maintained.

"This gentleman rescued me from the disturbance outside," said the young woman. "Like a knight in shining armour."

Nathan placed one hand on his breast and bowed to her. Then he turned to Tyndale.

"A letter from Fr. Pelham—my parish priest, that is—should have preceded me."

"Oh? I couldn't say," said Tyndale. "We receive so many letters."

"Fr. Pelham assured me that the proprietor of Tyndale's Bookshop was the most trustworthy publisher in London—or anywhere else, for that matter. With a discerning eye for literature."

None of this was intended as lip-service; he was only saying, if fervently, what he believed to be true. But it was with a wry smile that Tyndale replied.

"Thank you. I recall Fr. Pelham's letter now—not, I hasten to add, because of your praise! As I recollect, he mentioned that you had discovered a rare work of fifteenth-century poetry?"

“I have indeed,” said Nathan eagerly. “An astonishing discovery, as I am sure you will agree. I brought it with me today, hoping that you would do me the honour of examining it.”

Tyndale’s expression was more than a little sceptical. In fact, he seemed on the verge of laughing Nathan out of his shop, but was prevented from so doing by a lingering trace of curiosity. Could this boy’s discovery possibly be real?

Nathan placed his prized sheaf of parchment on a table.

The words “fifteenth-century poetry” seemed to have had the power to call Mr. Evans away from his desert island. Nathan heard the scrape of the older man’s chair as he rose from the reading desk. “Let me take a look, if I may,” he said, peering at the leaves of parchment.

Nathan pointed at the final page. “As you can see, it says ‘*Wroten bie Godes servant Thomas Howard the .iii. daye of Novembre in the .m cccc lxxx v. yere of our Lorde God*’—which is why I believe it to be the work of a churchman.” He decided to press his case still further. “In fact, Mr. Tyndale, I write poetry myself. I should be honoured if you would examine some of it too.”

“You hope to publish it?”

“Yes. I believe it merits as much.”

“Both matters will need to be considered at length,” said Tyndale. “For the time being, let us attend to the business on which Miss Roughhead has so graciously come.”

Farrow handed the carefully re-sorted signatures to his master. “They should be in order now—after this youth’s manhandling of them.” He then turned to simper at the young woman. “But what luck that the floor had just been cleaned! The pages are quite unsoiled.”

“In view of their maltreatment, however,” Tyndale added, “I shall, of course, reduce the price as much as I am able.”

“How scrupulous of you,” smiled the girl. *Like a cloud of butterflies taking wing*, thought Nathan.

“Do I correctly surmise, Miss Roughhead,” said Mr. Evans, looking up from the parchment, “that you are the daughter of Sir Charles Roughhead?”

When the girl did not reply, Farrow answered in her place. “Quite so, sir,” he said. “Miss Elaine Roughhead.”

Evans approached her and bowed, hand respectfully on his breast. “I

have the honour of doing business with your esteemed father," he said. "I thought I remembered having seen your face while visiting your home. Guy Evans, at your service."

Elaine gave a perfunctory bow.

"How shall we bind the book?" asked Tyndale.

"French morocco with gilt dentelle," said Elaine.

"Very good. Let us discuss the colour of the leather and the design of the dentelle in more detail once you have seen some samples. Farrow! Fetch the dentelle patterns and leather swatches. Some end-band samples, too, while you are at it."

Patterns and swatches—Nathan felt as if he they were discussing the binding for his own poetry collection. Dentelle was a new way of decorating the covers of books, invented only this century, in which delicate, lace-like designs were embossed around the borders of the cover in gold leaf. The centre was left empty, or sometimes adorned with floral designs or a family crest. It was much more elegant than the *pointillé* style that Le Gascon had popularized in the previous century, or the earlier "fanfare" and monastic bindings.

"The artisan to whom we were accustomed to entrust the gold leaf work for your bindings has, I regret to report, fallen ill. His lungs, I am told. Not to worry, however—there are others just as skilled."

Nathan stood behind Elaine, watching as she looked through the samples. Mr. Evans was still examining the fifteenth-century poem; Robinson Crusoe, it seemed, would be permanently marooned.

Finally Elaine selected a French morocco leather dyed a deep scarlet. As she was considering the design for the spine, however, she began to look rather unwell.

"Pray excuse me a moment," she said, pressing a handkerchief to her mouth as she rose to her feet. "Is there—er—a closet I might…?"

Nathan grasped the situation at once. Stripping off his jacket, he moved to her side and caught the vomit in it as she hunched down. He then wrapped it up and put the bundle in a corner before leading her to a couch.

"You must rest for a time," said Tyndale, hurrying over. "Farrow, some water for our guest. Then call at her house to tell them that she has taken ill and have someone sent to escort her home."

"No escort will be necessary," she protested in a weak voice. "I shall

recover presently."

"I see. In that case, please rest as long as you need."

Elaine beckoned Nathan to her. "I should like to loosen my garments," she said. "Would you be so kind as to close your eyes and assist me?"

Nathan did as he was asked. Once her bodice was open, her slender fingers guided his hand to the laces of her whalebone corset. Behind Nathan's closed eyelids, her body burned bright as phosphorus.

While Elaine was reclining on the couch, he quietly asked Tyndale if there was somewhere he could wash his jacket.

Tyndale glanced at the bundle in the corner with obvious distaste. "Throw it away," he said dismissively.

"But…" It was his only jacket, though he couldn't say as much for fear of undermining his image.

"Throw it on the dust-heap outside."

Nathan complied. By the time he returned, Elaine's eyes were closed.

"How did a boy like you come into possession of an old document like that?" Tyndale wanted to know, peering over his pince-nez.

He was not a boy. He was seventeen. He was often mistakenly thought younger due to his slight frame.

Mr. Evans was also watching him now.

"I thought the circumstances were described in the letter from Fr. Pelham," he said.

"I wish to hear it from you directly."

"It was among the effects of my late father. He taught at a parish school. He liked to read, and had a library of rather more books than our family's finances justified. He was also an antiquarian, with a fondness for anything of great age. The discovery of the poem happened long before I was born, when our church was renovated."

Mr. Evans nodded, listening intently. Nathan began to warm to his tale as well.

"When they put the parish records in order, they set aside a pile of old parchment that was no longer needed. The verger was about to make a bonfire of it when my father intervened and took possession of it instead. I happen to share his love of reading. I worked my way through the collection he left behind to gather dust in the attic. My mother and brother

have no interest in books, and they would have been used for kindling without my protection."

"Fr. Pelham's letter mentioned that you had an interest in old books that belies your age," recalled Tyndale.

"I found this poem among the bundle of parchment my father rescued from the flames. Most of the documents were simply records of observances or financial matters, and of no lasting interest—but I am sure you can imagine my excitement when I discovered this poem."

"Were you able to read it? The language is quite archaic."

"I was. I did resort to the assistance of a dictionary of old English, but I read it all in the end. Indeed, the exercise left me with some understanding of the earlier forms of our language."

"I shall borrow it for a while," said Tyndale. "Forgeries are so very common. My examination must be thorough."

"As you wish," Nathan said. He removed one leaf of parchment and handed the remainder to the bookseller.

"Why hold back one page?" asked Evans.

"As insurance against the rest being used without my permission."

"How impertinent!" said Farrow. "To suggest that Mr. Tyndale cannot be trusted!"

The latter restrained his employee with a pained smile.

"Might I impose on you to read the poems I have written myself as well?" asked Nathan.

"Leave them with me. I will go through everything later."

"Thank you."

By now Elaine was sitting up again, clothing re-laced and back in order.

"Are you feeling better, Miss Roughhead?" asked Tyndale.

"Yes. It was the smell of the leather. I am quite fond of it usually, but for some reason… In any case, all is well now. Pray excuse my behaviour."

"Shall I summon a sedan chair? Perhaps you would prefer a carriage?"

"I fear the swaying of either would only make me ill again. I shall walk instead. It is not a long way."

"Allow me to see you home," said Evans, but she ignored him.

"Farrow, accompany her," ordered Tyndale.

"No, I shall impose upon my knight—you," said Elaine, directing the last word at Nathan. "Will you walk me home?"

“It would be a pleasure,” he said, with the utmost sincerity.

How many writers, going back to ancient times, have commented on the unwiseness of love? Nathan was familiar with such warnings. “Love is double folly.” Nathan, in fact, was rapidly becoming foolish on his own, but was yet to realize it. “Falling in love hurts as much as any other fall.” Caustic judgements like this were far from rare. “Love! So you love a pair of lungs, a digestive tract, some intestines and organs of evacuation, a runny nose, a greedy mouth, and a whiff of body odor? Think on such matters and your passion should ebb a little.” Such advice was wasted on Nathan, however.

Many of those who had cautioned against love were French, but Shakespeare had also contributed to the genre—in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, for example: “This is the liver-vein, which makes flesh a deity / a green goose a goddess: pure, pure idolatry.” When younger, Nathan had read the Bard’s complete works, but of love’s true nature he knew nothing personally.

As they were passing a tailor’s shop, Elaine stopped. She wore a hooded cape about her shoulders, but Nathan was in his shirtsleeves. The chill wind had already robbed his lips of their colour.

A clerk came out to greet Elaine. “Good day, madam!”

“A jacket to suit this young gentleman, if you please,” she said.

“Certainly. Allow me to take his measurements.”

“We are in a hurry. I need the jacket at once.”

“But, madam, as you know, we make all our clothing to order.” Elaine looked crestfallen, while the clerk appraised Nathan’s scuffed shoes with a certain glint in his eye. “If I may suggest a possible solution, it would be to inquire at an establishment specializing in second-hand clothes. But, of course, the daughter of Sir Charles Roughhead should not be seen in such a place! Allow me to go instead and secure a presentable jacket for your companion—to show our appreciation for your regular custom.”

“That would be most kind.”

“Pray wait inside. We have taken delivery of some fine French lace. You may find something to your liking.”

They were shown into a private room, where a female assistant produced a series of fabric samples and babbled of continental fashions. Elaine let her talk but paid little attention.

Finally the jacket arrived. Even second-hand, it was much smarter than

anything else Nathan owned.

"This is to make up for your ruined jacket earlier," Elaine told him, before turning to the clerks. "Will someone please escort me home? My young companion and I must go our separate ways."

She extended her hand to Nathan in a gesture of farewell. Impulsively, he dropped to one knee like a knight receiving a favour.

Edward and Nigel had said they would not arrive until after four, but Nathan was at Matthew's before the clock struck one. He knew nowhere else to pass the time after parting from Elaine.

The coffee-house faced a stone fountain in the centre of a small square, just as Nigel had said. Perhaps the fountain was currently out of order; at any rate, no water came from it.

Inside Matthew's, groups of patrons sat at tables reading the newspapers that the coffee-house took, chatting idly, or engaging in debate. They appeared to be regulars, quite at home here. Some had a member of staff bring them pen and paper and occupied their time writing. An elbow-chair by the fireplace that appeared to be the best seat in the room was occupied by an elderly, bewigged, good-looking man.

There were no coffee-houses in Sherbourne, so this was the first time he had sampled the black beverage. The first mouthful was so bitter that he almost spat it out, but after following the lead of the other patrons and adding the milk and sugar served alongside the drink, the result was quite agreeable.

He had the uneasy feeling of being out of his depth, but he was too busy considering how to tell Edward and Nigel about his morning to pay that much attention to his surroundings.

I rescued her from a brawl.

Put in words, the experience went flat. How could he express the excitement of that moment? If not in verse, what right had he to call himself a poet?

Having eaten nothing since his breakfast of frumenty, he was hungry enough to order some gingerbread. When the waiter brought it to his table, Nathan asked whether he might also be able to borrow pen, paper, and ink like some of the other customers.

Soon he had writing implements in hand, but he found it difficult to confidently make a start.

He closed his eyes and mulled over the memory of the encounter.

All at once, inspiration struck. He pushed his coffee cup to one side, dipped his quill in the ink, and began to record the words that now flowed through his mind.

A ballad in form, it told of the liaison between a young page and an exotic noblewoman. He called it *Elegy*, and wrote it in an archaic mode suitable for the subject. An avid reader since childhood, he had devoured the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and others. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was, of course, in the mediaeval idiom of its author; Nathan had made his way through a recent edition published with a glossary, and the wording had stuck with him. Deciphering the parchment documents among his father's effects had further broadened his knowledge of the English of preceding centuries. He had learnt older spellings, turns of phrase, even the lettering.

But none of this knowledge—this genius—was any use to him in Sherbourne.

He had been sent to a school founded by a wealthy philanthropist, but it offered instruction only in the business and legal jargon required for the positions in which it was able to place its pupils, which held absolutely no interest for him. Leaving there at fourteen, he had been taken on as an apprentice at a legal office with ties to the school. The apprenticeship was to last seven years, and pay nothing for the duration.

Nathan continued working on his poetry in the moments he could snatch from his work. Only Fr. Pelham had recognized the talent in him.

For three years he had endured life as an unpaid apprentice. Then he had quit his position and boarded a stage-coach.

He already felt he had arrived in London, not yesterday, but much longer ago.

A silver moone shon ful & brighte
Upon a lowly youthe's unrest.
And fast did flowe the tyde of blode
In that unquiet brest.

(His pen was fairly racing across the page now.)

Wery been he, with steppen slow,
Ageyn the wind he went.
"O whyfore, if the byrds alle slepe

Must I…

The nib of the quill grew rough and began to catch on the paper. The inkpot was almost empty, too. They had given him a well-worn pen and only a splash of ink. But he couldn't stop now or the flow of verse would cease. Keeping his pen in motion and his eyes on the paper, Nathan raised his left hand to summon a waiter.

None was quick in coming. Irritated, he called out.

"Quiet, please," the waiter said, approaching.

"A new pen," Nathan said curtly. He did not even want to waste the time it would take to sharpen the nib with a penknife. "Ink, too. The pot is empty."

Faced with this rude young customer, one unlikely to offer a tip, the waiter ignored his request and walked off.

"A pen! Quickly!" He pounded the table.

There were cold stares from the patrons sitting nearby.

Another, older waiter approached. "I regret to say that our stock of pens is entirely depleted, as is our ink. May I suggest you try a different establishment?"

"I have an appointment here," Nathan told him. "No other place will do."

"As you wish," he replied, turning away with an air of obvious disdain.

How long had Nathan been waiting? The elbow-chair was now occupied by a different person. This man rose and drew near, then peered at the *Elegy*. He pointed at a couple of words. "Your spelling is wrong," he said.

"No, it is *you* who are wrong," Nathan retorted, pushing his hand away. "At one time, this spelling was current. It can be embarrassing to offer advice on topics one is unfamiliar with."

"So you know the old way of spelling, do you?" The man did not seem offended. "How impressive." He came even closer—so close that Nathan was forced to turn his head away lest their cheeks touch. "And you have a way with words," he said. "A young Shakespeare, I do declare."

"Shakespeare wrote less than two centuries ago. I am using a more archaic English still."

"And you can write as they did all that time ago?"

"I can."

The man summoned a waiter. “Bring this boy a new pen and some ink,” he said. “And another cup of coffee—the latter at my expense. As for me, I must away. My bill, please. The change shall be your tip.”

Nathan sipped his new coffee with pleasure. A new pen and fresh ink were mysteriously made available, too. But his poetic inspiration had abandoned him.

He tried to check the time, only to realize that his pocket-watch was missing. His purse as well!.

“Pickpocket!”

He leapt to his feet, looking from side to side. The other patrons pretended not to notice.

The older waiter approached again.

“Are you finally ready to pay and leave?” he asked.

“I have been robbed,” Nathan said. “My purse and watch have gone.”

“No one leaves here without paying, young man,” he warned.

“It was him—the person who was just here. I thought he seemed too familiar!”

“Mr. Harrington? That is insulting! Mr. Harrington is a regular patron, and publisher of the *Public Journal*.”

“Well, then, who *did* steal my purse and watch?”

“How should I know?”

Nathan remembered someone stumbling and bumping against him while he was engrossed in his writing. That may have been the pickpocket. He had not even seen his face.

Far from sympathizing, the waiter threatened him with the magistrate’s office—“and Fleet Street Prison”—if he didn’t settle his bill.

“Wait, I beg you. I have friends arriving directly.”

“At what time?”

“Just after four… . Ah!” He ran towards the door, arms wide to embrace the two figures who had just walked in.

“Well, hello,” said Edward. “Have you been waiting long?” To Nathan, his voice was like a long-lost childhood friend’s.

“Mr. Turner, Mr. Hart, this is a friend of yours? This ill-mannered youth?”

“Only as of yesterday, but yes.”

“Your usual table is available,” said the waiter, leading them to their

seats. Nathan moved to sit with them, bringing his pen and paper along. He forced a smile through clenched teeth. It would have been too shameful to show them a face on the verge of tears.

"Did you reach Shoreditch safely yesterday?"

He nodded.

"No encounters with blackguards or robbers?"

"None."

"There's a miracle for you," said Edward.

"That's not like you, using a word like 'miracle,'" teased Nigel.

"Why?" asked Nathan. "Don't you believe in miracles?"

"I do not."

"Not even the Resurrection? Are you an atheist?"

"A deist," said Edward. "It is not God I deny. Only miracles."

"Then you don't believe that the soul either ascends to Heaven or is punished in Hell?"

"The Middle Ages are over."

"You must have come under the influence of Toland."

"Have you read Toland too?"

"I have, but I don't agree with his denial of the miraculous," said Nathan. "A world with no mysteries or miracles—what a cheerless place that would be! Toland limits religion to ethics," he went on. "But ethics are just a guide to social harmony. A human invention. God is a being who transcends our shallow understanding… . I take comfort in the idea of being buried in a churchyard eventually—as if in His embrace."

He stopped and smiled ruefully. "A miracle may have kept me safe yesterday," he added, "but not today." His friends were then told about the robbery here.

The same waiter brought two cups of coffee.

"You are going to be out of pocket today, Mr. Turner. This acquaintance of yours occupied a table for hours without a penny to his name, helping himself to coffee, gingerbread, and quantities of paper. Not to mention the fee for ink and pens."

"You charge for them?" asked Nathan, startled.

"Of course we do, *sir*."

Edward sighed. "Never mind. Let today be my treat, as thanks for the loan of this book." He handed back the volume on heraldry.

“I should like to pay half,” said Nigel. “I read the book too, after all.”

“No, please—it will be lending, not paying,” Nathan protested. He could not accept charity. “I promise to repay you the next time we meet.”

Before leaving Sherbourne, he had sold all he owned to put together a small sum. In addition, Fr. Pelham had raised a collection for the young poet who was soon to be the pride of the parish, and presented him with the results—seven guineas and sixpence—as another parting gift. Nathan had paid the first instalment of his board, and lost the coins he had set out with today, but the rest was still hidden between his blanket and the straw mattress that served as his bed.

“What were you writing?”

“A poem.”

“May we read it?”

“Certainly.”

Edward and Nigel leaned in to peer at his work together.

“What language is this?”

“Our own fair tongue, as it was in the fifteenth century.” Nathan realized that he must look rather smug.

His two friends praised it even more than he had hoped.

“Was the poetry you showed Mr. Tyndale also written in old English?” asked Nigel.

“No. Being something I hope to publish, I used tomorrow’s words.”

“Tomorrow’s?”

“To describe things people will feel at a future time. With words that render colour and sound.”

“Well, I hope it is published soon.”

“I shall present each of you with your own bound copy.”

“Please do! And I shall return the favour when my own book comes out.”

Nigel’s comment pricked at Nathan’s vanity. “You also write poetry?” he asked, feeling fellowship and rivalry conflict within him.

“Not poetry. I do illustrations. And I don’t know when they will be published in any case.”

“Not just any illustrations,” said Edward. “As good as any of the old masters, our Professor claims.”

Jealousy surged for a moment inside Nathan, but he brought it under

control by reassuring himself that their endeavours were quite different. And even Fr. Pelham, who greatly admired his work, had never rashly compared it to Shakespeare's sonnets or John Donne.

"Are you both studying art? Royal Academy students?"

"No, although Nigel's father is an artist, so he was used to drawing early on."

"But I wish you would just tell me. Your answers are so evasive."

The other two exchanged a glance.

There they go again, thought Nathan. As if conversing with their eyes.

"We are training to be physicians," Edward informed him. "But Nigel's ability to accurately draw the human body is what our Professor prizes in him."

"He thinks highly of Edward too," Nigel added.

"When the Professor's research is published as a book, he intends to include Nigel's drawings as copperplate etchings."

"Ah. I see," said Nathan.

"Incidentally, where is that prized object you were going to show us today?"

"My apologies. But I left it with Mr. Tyndale earlier." He explained about the old poem and its provenance.

"Amazing!" Nigel leaned forward. "You'll be recognized both as a poet *and* an antiquarian." He appeared to feel no rivalry or jealousy at all.

Nathan asked them if they came here every day, but before they could reply, Nigel suddenly stared and burst out laughing.

"What?" asked Edward.

Nigel pointed at the window. "The fountain has just started working again!"

A pedestrian whose false sense of security about the fountain's inactivity had made him walk too close was now drenched from head to toe and shouting.

"Ha! That I like to see!"

The satisfaction in Edward's voice surprised Nathan. Was he the sort who took pleasure in others' misfortunes?

"That fellow's a poacher," Nigel explained, indicating the fountain's victim outside.

"A poacher?"

The man was now waving a damp cocked hat about. He seemed well turned out, looking at least respectable if not patrician. Neither his dress nor his features suggested a disreputable sort of person.

"And quite an active one," said Nigel. "To answer your question, no, we do not come every day, but we are here often."

Presently, the man opened the door of Matthew's and called for the proprietor.

"You are responsible for the fountain, I believe."

"No, sir. The fountain is administered by the city," he was told. "Pray raise your complaints with the mayor instead."

Edward's laughter provoked a glare in their direction. They nodded back politely, watching him make an indignant departure and collide with another patron just entering, who doffed his cap and bowed to him, saying a word or two before being shown to a table.

On noticing Edward, the newcomer rose to his feet again and came over, extending his hand.

"Is your little Danny well?" asked Edward.

"The picture of health," he was told. "As chubby as can be. My wife is also well. Do call on us again—Danny dotes on you… . Ah, here is my appointment. Give my regards to Professor Barton."

So saying, he returned to his own table, where he began discussing something with his guest.

"Someone you know?" asked Nathan.

"The head of the Temple Bank. Mr. Hume."

"So you are on good terms with the banking fraternity," marvelled Nathan.

Soon, Nathan noticed letters being distributed to the handful of regulars who took their mail at the coffee-house. *Mr. _____, care of Matthew's Coffee-House, Covent Garden, London*. How cosmopolitan, to use a regularly patronized establishment as a base for correspondence!

"I, for one, intend to come here as often as possible. Not only can one write in peace, they have newspapers to read as well."

Compared to his dim attic room with the Barretts, this was bliss. Newspapers cost threepence each, but here one could read as many as one wished for nothing. Ink, pen, and paper, however, he would bring with him. He could save additional money by eating at a stall outside instead.

“If I can regularly enjoy your company here, too, that would be even better,” Nathan told them.

He decided to overlook the condescending treatment he had received from the staff: they would change their tune once he was a regular. (It did not occur to him that a customer who offered no tips would be unwelcome.)

His romance with the beautiful Elaine he resolved to keep to himself. Nigel would surely be pleased on his behalf in his innocent way, but Edward had a sarcastic streak that gave him pause. Even Elaine calling him her knight might invite teasing or mockery.

His time with her had become a precious memory, and he wished to keep it unsullied.

Leaving the others behind, Nathan bought some black bread from a baker in the same street and then reluctantly made his way back to his dismal lodgings. Remembering Elaine dispelled his dejection, but, to his consternation, its place was taken by a yearning so strong he could hardly breathe.

“We really cannot have you coming here every day,” said Farrow through the crack in the door, which he then closed.

Nathan had returned to Tyndale’s bookshop daily since leaving his poetry there. *Have you read them yet? Are they publishable?* Farrow had shooed him away each time. He had not seen Tyndale himself since their first meeting.

Nathan forced the door open again and pushed his way into the shop.

“Let me see Mr. Tyndale, please,” he said.

“He is extremely busy, and has instructed me to tell you so if you came. He has not yet had time to read your manuscripts. When he does, he will send for you. Until then, please wait.”

“I can be reached at Matthew’s coffee-house,” said Nathan.

“Yes, very good.”

“How much longer will it be?”

“I am sure I don’t know.”

“Then ask Mr. Tyndale.”

“Mr. Tyndale does not know either. He will read your poetry when he has time to do so, and not before. Good day.”

“Remember—Matthew’s!” said Nathan.

Part of the reason he kept returning was the slender hope of

encountering Elaine again. She still had to pick up her elegantly bound copy of *Manon Lescaut*, and then…

Would she bother calling at the shop? He doubted it. Once the work had been completed, Farrow or Tyndale himself would simply deliver it to the Roughhead mansion.

Nathan thrust aside his tender hopes and thought the matter over again. Manon Lescaut was no less "fickle and wicked" a person than Moll Flanders. Despite her youth and sweet appearance, she drew men to her and destroyed them. The book was certainly racy enough to justify Tyndale's concern about what her parents would think of her reading it. So perhaps, not wanting her family to see her purchase, she *would* make another appearance at the shop.

After breakfasting on frumenty from a stall in the square, he made his way to Matthew's. This had become a daily routine.

The staff at the coffee-house, of course, had little affection for the thoughtless youth who paid sixpence for a single cup of coffee and then nursed it for hours, reading all the newspapers, spreading out his writing implements as if at home in his study, and even glaring at the other patrons if their conversation grew too animated—all without tipping—but Nathan did not sense their displeasure. Despite being keenly attuned to human emotion, he had a distinctly insensitive side as well. His nature blended confidence with insecurity, and he was of that unfortunate variety of person who tends to view others as greater fools than himself. He found it difficult to get on with people, and had strong opinions on many things.

He took a seat and laid out his work on the table.

"O whyfore, if the byrds alle slepe,
Must I flye on, by longing sent?"

His pen wandered, toying with something "vast & dep."

"Excuse me."

He looked up to see the man who had once bought him a cup of coffee: Harrington, publisher of the *Public Journal*.

"Do you remember me?" the latter asked.

"Of course. You accused me of misspelling, but in fact—"

"Yes, quite," said Harrington. "I consulted a dictionary of archaic usage afterwards. You were right. I apologize unreservedly for my error."

Nathan smiled with a certain satisfaction. Of social graces like

deference or modesty he knew very little.

Harrington glanced at the lines he was working on.

"It is still only a first draft," Nathan said, snatching the paper away.

"Most impressive," said Harrington, letting the boy's behaviour pass without comment. "How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"You are small for your age. I should have guessed fourteen or fifteen at most. Are you a student on holiday?"

"I am an autodidact."

"Even men from Oxford and Cambridge cannot write like that." Here, at last, was the recognition Nathan had long desired. "The more I read of yours, the more surprised I am. Can you write in a less elevated register as well?"

"Of course."

"Would you be interested, I wonder, in writing something for my newspaper?"

Nathan's breath seemed to catch in his throat. If he had given vent to his true feelings, he would have leapt up to embrace the man and kiss him on the cheek. But he was vain enough, too, to want to maintain his composure rather than lower his image in that way.

"Thank you," he said. "I should be delighted to see my poetry published there."

"There is no literary column in my paper," Harrington told him. "What I want you to write is satire. I shall provide the themes. Tell me, what is your opinion of the state of politics today?"

"Politics has never appealed to me."

"More's the pity. A young man should keep his eye on the nation's bearing."

Despite Nathan's lack of interest in the topic, the offer was too tempting to refuse.

His name in a newspaper! The prospect of earning some money was a welcome one too. The small sum he had brought with him was rapidly dwindling as he paid for food and board. It was anyone's guess when his poetry would become a source of income.

Would Tyndale buy the rights to the parchment poem too?

He had to establish himself comfortably before his money ran out.

“I accept your offer,” he said.

Harrington held out his hand. “Come to our offices on the morrow. Here is the address.” He took Nathan’s pen and wrote it down on the edge of his poetry.

A man of no sensitivity, thought Nathan with irritation.

After Harrington had left the coffee-house, he continued working on his poem.

Then neath a starling’s wenge of sterres,
Toward that page of pale face,
A very shadowe, perill grave,
In derknesse forth did race… .

When the words ceased to come, he laid down his pen.

“Bring me the *Public Journal*,” he told a passing waiter.

The waiter shrugged. “We don’t take that one,” he replied coldly.

Nathan paid his bill and went outside to buy a copy from a newspaper boy. His name and writing would be published in this journal.

It was a simple affair—just one large sheet folded in half. The first of the four pages attacked the government in exaggerated terms, and the other three were filled with what was essentially gossip.

This was not what he wanted to write. His elation quickly disappeared. He crumpled the newspaper into a ball and threw it away.

He knew that once he submitted to self-pity, it was difficult to escape its clutches. But wasn’t he in fact a failure, on the whole? Were the sheets of paper with his scribblings on them any better than this rubbish? The other pedestrians suddenly seemed to be sneering at him. He felt engulfed in hostility.

In Sherbourne, whenever he sank into gloom in this way, he had visited his church. Fr. Pelham had always offered encouragement.

Here, the churches were brothels.

He bought some more black bread and followed his feet to the graveyard again.

Sitting down beneath a cypress tree made him feel slightly easier at heart.

The flowers that had been on that grave were gone now.

Another grave had new flowers.

Nathan buried his face in his hands.

Chapter 3

"Let us recommence our dissection of the young woman before we are interrupted again," said Barton briskly. "Nigel, you draw. We shall omit the venous wax injections. Capturing the condition of the foetus on paper is more important."

Nigel and Edward had already washed their hands and changed out of their sooty clothes.

"The constables are bound to return," said Clarence. "What if they see the girl?"

"Once the sketches are complete, if they insist on taking her I would have no objection," the Professor replied.

"They might arrest you."

"No, I think not. An unmarried daughter's pregnancy is a scandal. I doubt the Roughheads would be inclined to make a fuss. If we return the girl at their request, that will be the end of it."

"Perhaps they will pay us to keep quiet."

Clarence bowed. "At your cervix, Lady Roughhead," he said.

"Everyone except Nigel, take the boy and the new corpse—not fresh, I suppose, but new—to your own dissection room, then pair off and begin your examinations. We need to start before putrefaction makes it impossible. Remember, these are autopsies. Pay close attention, determine the cause of death, and record everything."

"Should we forgo the preservatives this time?"

"Yes. It is summer; no other students are about, and these remains do not need to be shared. No preservatives. Work quickly."

Cadavers being highly valuable, they were often stitched back together after each dissection for the next student to use. As a result, preparing them against decay was usually the first order of business.

"Carry them in," said Clarence, assuming an administrative role in Barton's stead.

Edward and Ben picked up the boy, and Al and Clarence took the faceless man. Together, they carried the bodies through the specimen room into their dissection area and laid them on tables.

The room had six tables in all—two rows of three. One wall was taken

up by a sink, and the opposite wall by shelves full of equipment. The windows had been smeared with soap to prevent anyone seeing in.

"This blue stuff on his chest is ink, I suppose," said Ben. He licked the tip of his finger, dipped it in the spreading stain, then tasted it.

"Be careful," said Al. "What if it is poison?"

Ben snorted at the suggestion, but hurried over to the sink to rinse out his mouth anyway.

The importance of observing with all five senses was something Professor Barton was forever impressing on his pupils. They had been made to taste everything from stomach acid to semen. A physician who was familiar with these substances under normal conditions could sometimes detect illness through the sense of taste alone.

"So, Edward, who is this?" asked Clarence, pointing at the boy.

Edward didn't answer.

"I had decided that it was you and Nigel who switched the bodies, so for your sake I made up that nonsense for the magistrate's she-assistant about buying from some grave-robbers. You owe me thanks."

"I know it."

"I think you also know who this boy is."

"I mean to tell Professor Barton later. Wait until then."

"Oh well, all right," sighed Clarence. "Covered in wounds, this one. I wonder if he was tortured. Quite skinny, as well. O short, unfortunate life!" He looked over at his own dissecting table. "And that one has been utterly defaced, you might say." No one laughed.

"He has bruises on his neck, too," said Al. "He might have been strangled."

"Possible cause of death, strangulation… . Any sign of poisoning?"

"Not on the epidermis."

"If we are not to use preservatives, we had better start from the belly."

The intestines were first to rot.

"I do not like opening someone younger than myself, I must confess," Ben said about his own task.

"Find what killed him," Clarence said sharply. "That may lead to finding the monster who did it."

Ben sighed again.

"'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done

quickly,’” recited Clarence. *Macbeth*. He bowed to the boy’s corpse. “Dilated to meet you,” he said solemnly, then turned to Al. “If we are to determine the cause of death, I think we can forgo the removal of subcutaneous fat and proceed straight to the organs.”

“I agree,” Al replied.

To help make a start, Clarence pushed the tip of the scalpel into the torso and cut a shallow sideways H. He then went over the lines again, deepening the incisions. Finally, he peeled back the flaps of skin. The boy’s nipples hung on either side of his body.

Ben then took over, scalpel working until he reached the pericardium.

“Quite hot in here,” he said, wiping his forehead with his sleeve.

“Let me have a go,” said Edward said, leaning over the opening.

“Stop it!” snapped Ben. He was speaking to the dog entwining itself about their legs below.

This time the dog was not Charlie but Bess, a pedigree cocker spaniel belonging to the Professor’s elder brother. Despite the fare she received at home, since tasting the content of Charlie’s bucket she made a habit of visiting whenever she could.

“I thought Bess had left home. It’s been a while since she last came. She must have returned.”

“Bess, keep out of the way. We have nothing for you today.”

“Go home! If your mistress learnt you were here, it is us she would blame.”

Robert Barton’s wife loathed the practice of dissection, and seldom visited the school. One day some months earlier she had come in search of Bess and found her with her nose in Charlie’s bucket. When she realized what it contained, she screamed and fainted dead away.

“Five or six days ago,” Ben said, “after Bess went missing, I remember Mrs. Barton standing at the door rather than come in, and calling for her from there.”

They chased the dog away and got back to work, but less than an hour later they had to put their scalpels down again when Bent-nose Toby announced that the magistrate and his entourage had arrived. The Professor called the four of them back into his own dissection room, where Nigel was busy drawing the opened womb. The foetus was curled up inside, head disproportionately large, with thread-like fingers in its mouth.

Anne Moore and Dennis Abbott walked in, guiding a fleshy man between them. His cheeks and chin were the picture of ruddy good health, and his pouting lips were curved like a girl's. He looked about fifty years of age, and immediately commanded a certain authority.

A thin strip of black cloth covering his eyes was tied at the nape of his neck.

"Sir John has decided to investigate the matter himself," announced Anne Moore.

Abbott moved a chair to the magistrate's side and helped him sit down.

Justice John Fielding doffed his cocked hat and fanned his nose with it. "Quite a powerful smell here," he said. "Now. Amputation of all four limbs is a disturbing and unusual occurrence. As one responsible for keeping the peace, I feel we must get to the bottom of it."

"And hence we have the honour…?" said Barton.

Miss Moore had turned towards the dissecting table. "I knew it!" she announced. "Sir John, the cadaver on the table is not the amputated boy. It appears be Miss Roughhead."

"Where are you, Mr. Barton?" asked the magistrate, extending his right hand.

"Here," the Professor said. "But before I shake your hand, I must wash my own."

"That will not be necessary."

As the two spoke, Abbott sidled closer to Nigel. Comparing the drawing Nigel was still working on with its model, he murmured with admiration.

Sir John heard. "What is it that has met with your approval, Abbott?"

"If only you could see this picture, Sir John," he said in a creaky sort of voice. "It looks realer than the thing itself."

Barton seized the opportunity to expound on the enormous contribution to the advance of medical science that his pupil's drawings would make.

The blind magistrate listened in silence. Then, assisted by Moore and Abbott to the dissecting table, he reached out with both hands and felt the body, using his palms and the tips of his fingers as his eyes.

Satisfied, he washed his hands in the tub of water Clarence had brought, and dried them thoroughly.

"Professor Barton," said Sir John. "As regards Miss Roughhead, we shall wait until this prize pupil of yours finishes his drawing. Thereafter,

you are to return the body to its plot at once. I am sure Sir Charles will not object. In any event, he will not wish to bring suit against you at the Old Bailey."

"Your generosity is appreciated," said Barton. He strode towards Sir John and clasped his hands in his own gory paws, shaking them firmly and obliging the magistrate to wash his hands again. "I have one more request, Sir John, knowing you as a friend and advocate of the science of anatomy. Dare I hope that it will be granted?"

"Perhaps, depending on what it is."

"Permit me to make a specimen of the foetus."

The magistrate was struck speechless. Barton pressed on.

"Showing the students real specimens is a vital part of their education," he said. "Mere textbooks and papers are little use at all. Moreover, the supply of cadavers for dissection is very limited. Foetuses are in particularly short supply since, as you know, women offenders are not hanged if they are expecting. Making this foetus into a specimen would give countless students the rare opportunity to see such a thing with their own eyes."

"And what of the feelings of Sir Charles and his wife? Their own grandchild, placed in a bottle and paraded before strangers…"

"I shall never reveal its provenance."

"That is hardly the point."

"Edward! Show Sir John one of your preparations."

"But Sir John is—"

"I know he is! Bring one in here!"

The glass jar Edward brought back immediately attracted Moore's attention, along with Abbott's.

"Anne, what do you see?" asked Sir John.

"A vivid red… branching, from thicker cords to thread-like tendrils, all tangled into a deformed sphere. The whole is inside a glass container."

"It's a work of art," said Abbott.

"Explain to Sir John how it was produced, Edward," Barton urged.

"This is the inner structure of a lung. Coloured wax is heated until it liquefies, and then injected into the lung's air passages. Once the wax cools and hardens, the whole is submerged in acid. The acid eats away the tissue itself, leaving only the wax replica of its structure, as you can see."

“Capillary vessels are difficult to see within the organ itself,” Barton told them. “This procedure makes them visible even when they are as fine as down.”

Edward displayed another jar. “This one is a brain, submerged in a preservative.”

“Through a long process of trial and error, Edward and I successfully formulated a more effective preserving fluid than any other,” said Barton. “The chief ingredient is alcohol; the other components, and their proportions, are a secret. Glass jars and alcohol are both heavily taxed, and pigments for colouring are also expensive. Without the capital provided by my brother, I should never have been able to assemble my collection.”

“You refer to Robert Barton, I assume,” said Sir John. “The renowned physician?”

“Yes. It is he who has made my work as a student of anatomy possible.”

“Robert was an acquaintance of my own half-brother, the previous magistrate, Henry Fielding. I myself do not often venture into polite society, and so I have not met him personally.”

“My brother often speaks of you with great affection.”

The magistrate shrugged. Robert, it seemed, had been embellishing the truth.

“Have I helped you understand, sir, the importance of these preparations?” asked Barton. When Sir John nodded, he continued: “This foetus is a priceless find. Comparing it with one in normal condition allows direct observation of how arsenic affects a child in its mother’s womb.”

“What was that?” Moore said. “Arsenic? There must be some mistake. We were told that she died of a sudden illness.”

“Are you saying that arsenic was the cause of that illness, Professor Barton?”

“I know only that this woman was exposed to arsenic before her death. Until your inquiries, both her name and background were unknown to me, along with the details of her illness. Accordingly, I cannot state definitely that arsenic was the cause of death as such. There are women who use it to whiten their skin, after all.”

“You may, perhaps be familiar with the case of the Countess of Coventry, who died some ten years ago at the age of twenty-seven,” Clarence put in. “Her cosmetics killed her. She used a mixture of white lead

and arsenic to whiten her face, and both are quite poisonous. Fairness of complexion might be estimable, but that seems a price too high to pay. Better to do as the women of Italy do—remove their paint at night and rub themselves with a mixture of flour and milk. Even Queen Elizabeth daubed her face half an inch deep with some quicksilver cream. It eventually gave her skin a dark and greenish tint and left her wrinkled as a monkey—which, of course, she concealed with more cosmetics, until even her teeth rotted and turned black, I am given to understand. I see that you refrain from using much embellishment, Miss Moore. A wise practice, if I may say so."

"How do you know she was exposed to arsenic?" asked Sir John, sounding genuinely and innocently curious.

Barton casually pulled back the dead woman's eyelids. "There is haemorrhaging under her conjunctiva. Facial oedema. Then there are her fingernails. They are shrunken, with white spots. The skin on her fingers is peeling also. Such effects are observable on the skin of many victims of arsenic poisoning. I might also mention that she has bruises—lesions on her buttocks which appear to have been caused by some blunt instrument."

"Anne?"

"Everything is as Mr. Barton says," she confirmed.

"Could these symptoms have been caused by something other than arsenic?"

"Possibly. By your leave, I shall perform an experiment to test for arsenic directly."

"Yes, by all means. First, however, allow me one question first. My assistant tells me that you said 'One does not come into possession of a six-months…'"

Barton's pupils looked at each other. So she had heard.

"How, before beginning the dissection, did you know she was six months pregnant? Can external examination alone furnish such detail, even when nothing is known of the time of conception?"

"We heard it from the grave-robbers who brought her in."

"Gobbin and Dick?"

"Yes."

"How did they know, I wonder? The Roughhead family kept it utterly secret."

"Perhaps a servant let something slip," suggested Moore. "Miss

Roughhead's nurse must have noticed her condition."

"Question the nurse later."

"Her nurse, you say?" Clarence remarked. "Your Runners mentioned her earlier, Sir John. They said that she was so overcome with grief that she took her own life. Isn't that so, Ben?"

"It is. As I recall, she was supposed to have poisoned herself at her charge's grave."

"Reports of this have not reached me, Anne."

"I did not know myself."

"Well, there is no obligation to report every suicide to the magistrate's office, I suppose. Who were these Runners?"

"Hales and Bray, it seems. They must have got wind of the grave-robbing and paid a visit here before we did."

"Yes, they spoke of it here."

"Check with the two of them later, Anne. Now, one more thing before the experiment. How many people are in this room as we speak, apart from the three of us? From the sound of footsteps and the like, I detect six."

"Just so, Sir John. Mr. Barton and his five pupils—six in all."

"Let us have each of those pupils introduce himself," said Sir John. "Who is the artist?"

"That is me," said Nigel nervously. "Nigel Hart."

Edward stood beside him with a hand on his shoulder.

"And the expert on preparations?"

"Me. Edward Turner."

"I am Clarence Spooner," said Clarence.

"Nicknamed 'the Chatterbox,'" added Anne.

"Aptly so," said Sir John. "Who else?"

"Benjamin Beamis."

"A rotund sort of fellow, I deduce."

"How did you know?"

"From your voice. And the last pupil?"

"Albert Wood," said Al. "Much skinnier. Could you tell from my voice?"

"I could not." The magistrate smiled. "Who else is in the house?"

"Toby, my doorkeeper, and the maid Nelly. Both Irish. Shall I summon them?"

“Your doorkeeper we have met. Let us call the maid. Professor Barton, pray begin your experiment.”

“Ben, fetch Nelly,” the Professor said. “Bring a rat from the kitchen as well. Al and Clarence, prepare a piece of meat dosed with arsenic. Edward, Nigel, ready the test apparatus.”

When Ben returned from the kitchen, Nelly following close behind, he was carrying an angry, frightened grey rat, gnawing at the bars of the rat-catcher’s cage in which it found itself.

“Professor,” said Ben. “It seems that Nelly is now keeping urchins as well as rats.”

“I don’t keep rats,” she replied in an indignant Irish brogue. “They keep themselves. The rat-catcher can’t keep up. As for the boy, well, he came to the door lookin’ fit to drop from hunger, so I gave him some broth and a crust of bread and let him rest a while. Heaven knows you’ve all turned your back on the Good Lord. An act of mercy to atone for your sins can’t do any harm.”

Nelly was a devout Catholic, and considered it sacrilegious to slice up the dead.

“Is the boy very weak?” Nigel inquired.

“Well, he is one of those as eke out a livin’ from beggin’ and mudlarkin’,” she said. “But please don’t confine him, m’lord. He’ll have his strength back after a sit-down and a bite to eat, and then he’ll surely find proper work. Give him a chance.”

“Rest assured, Nelly, I am not cruel.”

“Aye, I know it, m’lord. Everyone does. Sir John Fieldin’, friend to the poor, scourge of the wicked. A man who’ll give you a fair trial.”

The magistrate dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

Clarence put the cage on a work-bench. Edward and Nigel had also brought in the test apparatus by then. It was a simple U-shaped tube of glass in a wooden frame.

“One end of the tube has a narrow nozzle attached,” Anne explained for the magistrate’s sake. “They have hung a piece of metal inside the nozzle. Zinc-plated, it would seem.”

“I smell something acid.”

“Edward Turner has introduced an acid into the U-shaped pipe through

its open end. Now Nigel Hart has brought a candle flame close to the nozzle."

Nothing happened.

Next, the pupils etherized the rat, ignoring its protests. Once it had gone limp, they drew a small quantity of blood from it. This was then mixed with the acid, and the results injected into the tube for testing. Once more, nothing happened. Anne reported the procedure from beginning to end.

"Sir John," said Clarence, "as you have seen—I beg your pardon: as you have heard—neither of these two tests revealed the presence of arsenic."

They had used only the merest drop of ether, so the rat soon groggily rose to its feet and looked around with what certainly appeared to those watching to be a look of suspicion.

"Forgive me, little fellow," said Ben, feeding it the piece of meat.

Moore informed the magistrate of the rat's death.

Once it had stopped moving, Edward drew blood from its corpse, mixed it with acid, and introduced the mixture into the tube.

Nigel brought the candle close.

"Flames have emerged from the nozzle," cried Anne.

Barton held a piece of porcelain close to the flames. The white porcelain was quickly covered in a glossy black film.

"The porcelain has become a mirror," Anne said, astonished again.

"When arsenic and zinc come into contact, they emit a flammable gas," Clarence said, a conjurer explaining his trick. "The flames, in turn, create a mirror film on porcelain. Like the alchemists of centuries past, we pursue the truth through repeated experiment. This marvellous apparatus was invented by Edward."

"There happened to be some porcelain nearby during an earlier experiment," the latter said modestly. "I was astonished myself to see it change colour and become mirror-like."

After washing the pipe, they drew some blood from the dead woman's body and repeated the procedure. Once more, flames spouted from the nozzle; once again, a piece of white porcelain was seared to a dark mirror.

"We have established that Miss Roughhead did absorb some arsenic," Sir John said. "But whether this was through malicious design or in cosmetics and the like, we cannot say. Is that correct, Professor Barton?"

“Indeed it is,” he confirmed. “If we could continue our dissection, opening the stomach and intestines would permit us to determine whether the arsenic was consumed orally or not.”

“By all means, do so. Now, I understand that Miss Roughhead’s cadaver was not alone.”

“There were two other bodies,” admitted Barton reluctantly.

“Two bodies in all, you mean—Miss Roughhead and the amputated boy.”

“Another has come to light,” said Barton.

“It was in the students’ dissection room,” said Edward, not mentioning that shortly before it was at the bottom of the chimney flue.

“When did you discover it?” asked Moore sternly. “Before my visit, or after?”

“After.”

“Do you know when it was put there?”

“We do not. The place was not in use due to the summer holiday.”

The group moved to the other room, all except Nigel, who stayed behind to keep drawing.

The dead youth’s chest and abdomen were still open.

As Moore described the state of the cadaver, the magistrate used both hands to feel and confirm it, brow furrowing slightly when he felt the stump above the boy’s right elbow.

“We found no signs of poisoning,” Al said. “Neither the stomach nor intestinal wall showed damage due to any poisonous substance. His stomach was almost empty. It was already impossible to determine from the content of his intestines what he had been eating.”

“He died some time after his final meal, then,” said Sir John. “Was it from loss of blood during the amputations? Or were they performed after his death? What say you, Professor?”

“Today’s medical science, I regret to report, cannot answer that question,” said Barton. “A means for determining such things has not yet been discovered. If microscopes could show finer detail, much that is now obscure would surely be disclosed, but at present using these instruments is like wearing spectacles with poorly ground lenses. They magnify twenty times, but the image is so blurred and distorted that the naked eye is a better tool. A most frustrating situation. Cadavers have much more to report to us,

if we can only learn to decode it… . And for this reason, too, the development of the science of anatomy is vital. Sir John, I beg of you, have the laws improved. Grant us lawful access to cadavers."

"Unfortunately, my powers do not extend that far."

"But you have revolutionized policing," the Professor said. "Your record is outstanding."

"Nevertheless, the government's unwillingness to cooperate leaves us severely underfunded."

"People are understandably wary of granting a law force too much power. But the peace cannot be kept by unofficial means."

"You understand the matter well."

"The public must be enlightened," Barton said. "Just as they must in combating the prejudice against dissection."

"We are in agreement, then. Now, where is the third body?"

They led Sir John to an adjacent table and removed the cloth covering the remains.

Moore gasped. Abbott gritted his teeth.

"I shall explain, Sir John," she said. "This body has no face. Furthermore, the abdomen and chest are split open—"

"They were opened for dissection," said Clarence.

"No face? Has it been decapitated?" asked Sir John.

"No. The head is attached, but the face has been obliterated," she told him. "I would rather not describe the details."

"But you must. You are my eyes."

"Very well.

The magistrate reached out to touch the shattered face as his assistant described what his fingers probed. When he was finished there, he examined the rest of the body. "This man does not seem to have been of the labouring class."

"His fingernails are clean," Moore observed.

"A writer by trade, perhaps. There is a callus on the first joint of his right middle finger. Are the tips of his fingers stained with ink?"

"Not noticeably, but ink is visible in the creases of his knuckles."

"Can you tell how old he was, Professor Barton?"

"Not elderly, but not a young man either. In his forties, perhaps."

Moore asked them to measure the body's height and record any

distinguishing features.

"When was he discovered? And by whom?" asked Sir John.

For several moments, there was silence.

"We all found him together—quite unexpectedly," Edward said finally. "After Miss Moore and her assistant departed, we brought the boy's body into the dissection room, where this man was lying face-up on one of the tables."

"When was the last time beforehand that you confirmed that nothing was on any of the dissecting tables?"

"I cannot recall exactly when it was. Owing to the summer holiday, this room has not been used for some time."

At Sir John's request, Moore described the room in detail: its dimensions, the number and position of the tables, the cabinets and other furnishings.

"The room has four entrances in all," she said. "Two lead to the specimen room, and two to the lecture hall. None are locked."

"Outsiders are free to come and go, then? That hardly sounds safe."

"We do have a doorkeeper," said Clarence.

The magistrate changed the subject. "Professor Barton, I am informed that with the passage of time the blood gathers at the lowest part of a corpse, causing bruises to appear on the skin. Does this body exhibit such bruising?"

With the help of his pupils, Barton turned the cadaver over and examined it. "Putrefaction has advanced too far to say," he reported, returning the body to its original position.

"The man may have been killed elsewhere, then, and brought here afterwards."

"All manner of things are possible," said Barton. "To ascertain the truth, a ready supply of comparative material is necessary."

"When do you estimate the man died?"

"That too cannot be known without inspecting more cadavers. We need to closely observe the changes that occur after death and analyse the outcome statistically. To do so, cadavers are required. Even the hangings at Tyburn can result in a tug-of-war." As his fervour rose, perspiration beaded on his forehead, making him look like a potato in the rain. "Even I, who have seen more dead bodies than most, have not seen enough to answer

your question precisely. I hope to provide my students with an accurate textbook. The old theories abided by since the Middle Ages are unsound, every one. ‘Illness arises from an imbalance of the humours.’ This explains everything, and so-called medicine is nothing but blood-letting and enemas. Yet to anyone who makes a true study of the human body, it is at once clear that these prized notions are utterly spurious.”

“I understand your position well, Professor. Nevertheless, I hope you will agree to allow an autopsy on these additional two cadavers to be performed by another. Both were discovered in a highly unnatural condition, and dispelling the suspicion that you or your pupils were involved will be difficult. Indeed, if you were to continue to examine them yourselves, some might suspect that you did so in order to eliminate evidence. You have no objection to my turning the matter over to a trusted physician, I presume?”

“I regret the loss of any opportunity for my pupils to perform a dissection, but I suppose I have no choice.”

“Anne, have Abbott procure two coffins and a carriage. Take the bodies to Dr. Osborne and ask him to carry out autopsies on them in my name. Then muster some officers and have them search this building for a murder weapon… . Professor Barton, is there anywhere we might go to escape this smell?”

“You are welcome to use my study.”

Barton led the way to the second floor, with Moore helping Sir John on the stairs. The others followed them up, including Nigel, who had finished his illustration.

Shown into Barton’s study, the magistrate wrinkled his nose. “The smell of death has been replaced by the smell of alcohol, it seems.”

“There are specimens in glass jars on the shelves,” his assistant told him.

At this point, Nelly arrived with some fragrant black tea.

“Our problems have begun to multiply,” Sir John announced. “Anne, a summary, if you please.”

“Certainly… . Arsenic was present in Miss Roughhead’s blood. Two other corpses were found: one a boy who appears to be between fourteen and sixteen. All four of his limbs were severed at the joint, but the cause of

death is unclear. The other belonged to a man estimated to have been in his forties. There is evidence that he was strangled.

"According to Mr. Barton and his pupils, they wrapped the body of Miss Roughhead in a cloth and hid it in the fireplace when Hales and Bray arrived during the dissection. Once the two men left, the bundle was retrieved just before Abbott and I appeared. As you know, Sir John, our visit was in response to some anonymous information. On opening the bundle, they discovered the boy's body inside instead of Miss Roughhead's.

"Mr. Barton and his pupils claim to know nothing of why this should have transpired. No one knows who the boy is, or why he has a blue fluid—which appears to be ink—smeared on his chest.

"When they took the boy's body to the other dissection room, they discovered the naked corpse of a man with a disfigured face lying on one of the tables. His identity is unknown, as is the time of his murder. No weapon has been found, but once our officers arrive, we shall begin a search of the premises.

"That is all that we have established at present. The truth of what these gentlemen have told us has yet to be confirmed."

Sir John sighed. "I suppose we must steel ourselves for another visit to that foul-smelling room," he said. "The fireplace in which Miss Roughhead's body changed places with the boy's must be inspected. An unpleasant task indeed."

Barton sighed as deeply as the magistrate had. "Clarence, explain the construction of the fireplace to Sir John."

"Is it necessary?"

"We cannot make a chimney-sweep of him, and he would soon discover the truth in any case."

"The fireplace is of the sort designed by Prince Rupert," Clarence began.

The magistrate understood the implications of this at once, depriving the chatterbox of a chance to chatter.

"We concealed the bundle containing Miss Roughhead at the base of the flue, with a rope attached," Clarence continued, hoping to keep at least the winch secret. The magistrate might grasp the importance of dissection and anatomical studies, but the letter of the law and the feelings of London's

citizens would not change so readily. It would be necessary for some time yet to obtain subjects by illegal means.

Barton, for his part, held his tongue so as not to hamper his pupil's circumspection.

"And when you pulled the bundle out, its contents had changed."

"Yes. Once your officers had left, we searched the flue again, to find another bundle—Miss Roughhead."

"I wonder," said Sir John, "if you would swear to that story in court, one hand on the Holy Bible? If it were untrue, you would be charged with perjury. It is a grave crime, punishable by transportation to the colonies."

Clarence looked about him evasively.

"It was just as he says," Edward said firmly. "I was the one who went in to the bottom of the flue. If there must be a trial, I will give sworn testimony."

Sir John rose wearily to his feet. "I believe we should examine that fireplace after all," he said.

Clarence ran ahead to raise the fire door and hide the hook before the others came in.

Miss Moore crawled into the fireplace. When she emerged shortly afterwards, her face was black as coal.

"There is hot water in the kitchen," Clarence told her. "Soot is difficult to get off."

"Thank you," she said. Her brown-green eyes stood out against her blackened skin.

A carriage carrying two empty coffins drew up at the Professor's residence, and a team of five constables came running afterwards. When the carriage departed with the cadavers, Abbott went with them while Moore remained behind with Sir John.

"Regarding the identity of those two bodies, your claim to know nothing of the matter remains unchanged, I take it?" the latter asked.

"I know nothing of them at all," said Barton, clearly troubled.

"And you, Clarence Spooner?"

"Likewise, sir."

"Portly Benjamin Beamis, how is it with you?"

"I know nothing, either."

"Remember as you answer that, while I am blind, my hearing is acute. I

can recognize from the voice alone when someone is telling the truth and when they are lying. Miss Moore's powers of observation are also sharp, and she sees on my behalf. Now, Albert Wood, what say you?"

"I know nothing about them."

"Edward Turner."

"Yes?"

"Do you know anything about the remains of the older man?"

"I do not."

"Do you know anything about the mutilated boy?"

"I do not."

When Sir John put the same two questions to Nigel, he received the same answers—but it did not take the magistrate's heightened sense of hearing to detect the quiver in his voice when answering about the boy.

Barton made a plea for tolerance, saying that Edward and Nigel were both young, but to the science of anatomy invaluable.

"Yet the questions are hardly *in*tolerant," Moore remarked.

"Let me make a proposal," said Barton. "I shall ask my pupils about the matter again later. I believe they will be more forthcoming to me than to you. What I hear from them I shall then pass on. I can state with certainty that neither of these two would ever be involved in anything untoward. Please leave the questioning in my hands. Discovering how Miss Roughhead came to take arsenic and who the faceless man is will surely keep you occupied enough."

"I accept your suggestion. And I expect you to return Miss Roughhead's body to her family once you have determined whether she was poisoned internally."

"With your permission, I shall remove the foetus and make a specimen of it. We will then prepare her against decay, sew her up, and send her back."

Clarence rounded this off by saying, "From now on, perhaps you could leave the autopsies to us. Your Bow Street Runners are famous for the pursuit and arrest of criminals—let us Bartonites be those who determine the cause of death. Particularly when there is any suspicion that arsenic is involved, Edward's apparatus will prove its worth."

"Arsenic," muttered Sir John. "Anyone who wanted to obtain it could do so."

The five constables now entered the room and announced that they had found nothing that appeared to be a murder weapon.

"Mind you," added one, "it could have been thrown into the Thames. You'd never find it then."

After their visitors had all left, Nigel passed several folded pages of drawings to his teacher.

"So you didn't throw them away!" Barton cried, delighted.

"Abbott found them after I hid them in the privy, but he seems to have decided not to pass them to Miss Moore. Before going to fetch a carriage, he returned them to me in private."

"A hard heart melted by your artistry!" said Barton. "Come, let us prepare the foetus. Edward, assist us. The rest of you, open Miss Roughhead's alimentary tract, check for traces of arsenic, record the results, and then preserve her against putrefaction and sew her back together."

Nelly poked her head in from the kitchen to announce that luncheon was ready.

"Later," said Barton. "We must finish this first."

Glancing at what his hands were doing, she made a hurried sign of the cross.

"The meat will go cold."

"Let it."

Lunch was the only meal Barton provided for his pupils. Sometimes the meal included some imported delicacy courtesy of Al's father, but Nelly had grown up in a remote Irish village and her culinary repertoire was limited.

It was almost two hours before Barton and his pupils finished their labours and sat down around the table.

"I am famished," said Ben. "What time is it, Edward?"

Edward began to reach into his pocket, then stopped and shook his head. "It's at the pawnbroker's," he muttered. He raised one finger to his lips, not wanting their teacher to know that he had pawned it.

Pocket-watches were expensive, and among the pupils only Edward and Al owned one. Al was from a wealthy family, but not Edward—he was an orphan. Barton had generously bought him a watch as a reward for making the arsenic testing apparatus. The timepiece was old, but it had not been cheap.

“Almost two o’clock,” reported Al, having fished his own watch out of his waistcoat pocket.

“Two? No wonder I am so hungry,” said Ben.

The lamb on their plates was cold and hard. As usual, Nelly had given Edward a large piece. Her devotion to him was the sole thing keeping her in service in this “house of the Devil,” as she put it, whose “sinful business” made her constantly cross herself. It was not customary in England for the cook to prepare different meals for master and staff: the former simply received the largest portion of meat or fish, and the latter whatever was left. Plates were big, and servings too. Beggars often called at the kitchen doors of wealthy households hoping for leftovers. Unlike his brother Robert, Barton was by no means wealthy, but he did well enough to supply the occasional beggar with scraps.

Because Al’s father gave them a discount, there was plenty of claret. Cold and tough as the meat may have been, the pupils stuffed it in their mouths and washed it down with the deep red wine.

Conversation was subdued. Clarence attempted to lighten the mood with an aphorism: “Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy!”

“… As Samuel Johnson said,” Edward added.

Edward’s interjection gave Ben the opportunity to interrogate him. “Why, incidentally, did you lie to the magistrate about the faceless man?” he asked. “You knew he was found at the bottom of the fireplace. He was only on the dissecting table after we carried him there.”

“The number of people who know how our fireplace is built is very small,” Edward said. “Not even the householder knows.”

“But then… Do you mean it might have been one of *us* who killed that man, smashed his face, and threw him down the flue?”

“If we had told Sir John the truth about where he was found, we would have been the first to fall under suspicion. And while *we* know very well that Professor Barton was not aware of the fireplace’s inner structure, the magistrate would doubtless suspect him too. With the man found on a dissecting table instead, Sir John will begin by trying to identify him and search for someone with a motive for doing it. An investigation begun broadly, without prejudice, will include suspects other than ourselves. I no

more believe that whoever committed the deed is among us than you do. I simply thought it best not to prejudice the magistrate."

"Still, to lie to him… I could not do it," Ben said with obvious concern. "My voice was all he needed to see through me—or, I should say, hear through me? Edward, he may have detected your falsehood as well. What will you do if he demands to know why you lied? Your explanation might satisfy us, but will it satisfy him—not to mention his assistant?"

"And what about that boy?" asked Clarence. "You said that it was you and Nigel who hung him from the winch hook, and that you would tell Professor Barton who he was. Can you tell us now?"

Nigel got to his feet. Turning away from them, he ran upstairs. Edward made to follow, but Barton called him back.

"Edward, let us speak in private," he said. "Al, Ben, Clarence, your work for the day is over. You are dismissed. Do not speak of today's events to your families, or anyone else."

"Not a word, we swear." Clarence spoke for all of them. "But, Professor, in due course we would be glad for the full story from you."

"All right, all right. Today, you may go."

They rose from the table. Al gave Edward a meaningful look and the two of them went to a corner to whisper together briefly.

"What is it?" Barton called to them.

"Oh—nothing," stammered Al. "Good day, Professor. Until tomorrow."

When the others had left, Barton invited Edward to his study upstairs. As they passed the room Edward shared with Nigel, the Professor made as if to knock on the door, but Edward stopped him, urging him not to disturb his friend.

Inside the study, Barton took a bottle of claret from the shelf. He poured some into a pewter cup for Edward, then poured another for himself.

"Edward, whatever is to come, I am with you," he told him. He drained his cup. "Even if you have been party to murder. Even if you have committed murder yourself. Your talent outweighs any crime. Now, tell me: what happened?"

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of before God." Edward left his cup untouched.

"Then I insist even more firmly, tell me. Tell me everything. What is the

secret you and Nigel share? *You* may be able to keep it, but not him. And he is another I cannot bear the thought of losing."

"What are your thoughts on the act of suicide, Professor?" Edward asked abruptly.

Barton looked discomfited. "I am neither theologian nor philosopher," he replied. "In the unlikely event that you died by your own hand, I know I would feel a great void in me. The same applies to Nigel. My grief would be heartfelt. I would blame myself, asking if I could not have done something to prevent it."

"Suppose that Nigel injured his right hand and could no longer do his illustrations. Would you dismiss him?"

Barton gave the question some thought. "I am not sure," he answered finally. "I know what my answer should be. 'Whatever may befall him, he matters to me.' Replying in this way would satisfy most people. But without being placed in that situation, I cannot say how I would respond. Whether my feelings for him would wax with pity—or the opposite."

"The same, I suppose, would apply if I were to sustain some injury to my head and lose the power of reason, then."

"I am sorry, but my answer is the same. I know it is cold-blooded, but I cannot say otherwise."

"In other words, Professor, it is our talent that you value; without it, our lives have little worth."

"Your questions are distressing," Barton said. "In all frankness, however, that is probably true."

"A child would give a more assuring answer," said Edward with a smile that belied his years. "Or no—a child would sense the desired answer and be sure to give it. Whatever his real feelings were."

He fell silent for a moment before continuing.

"On the question of suicide. There is not one line in the Bible condemning it as a sin. St. Augustine had to adopt Plato's argument that to kill oneself is to kill the image of God. In other words, suicides are heretics."

Barton had never seen Edward speak with such intensity before. Usually, his pupil was not very talkative. Now, however, he seemed driven by some pressing urge, much like Barton himself when describing the common ignorance of the importance of anatomical studies.

“The person who decisively labelled it a sin was Thomas Aquinas—in fact, a triple sin.” He began to count on his fingers, in what seemed to Barton a rather childlike way.

Edward began to count on his fingers, in what seemed to Barton a rather childlike way.

“A sin against God, who gave him life. A sin against the laws of society. And a sin against human nature—the inborn instinct for self-preservation.”

The wine made Barton’s head spin slightly. Edward’s exposition felt almost like an invitation to the act.

“Thus self-murder was formally condemned. In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, suicides are below even heretics and murderers in Hell. The deed was considered an affront not only to life but also to death. Soon suicides were not even permitted burial in churchyards. In fact, their remains were buried at crossroads, with a stake through the heart, so that everyone who passed by would tread on them and help keep their spirits pinned in place. Suicide was made an absolute evil by the Church in its patriarchal role. It was an act of rebellion against their authority, which they recast as treason against God. Whether a man lives or dies, they argued, was for God to decide.”

“Theological disputation is of little interest to me,” Barton confessed. “But suicide, for those left behind, brings on despair. I speak hypothetically, as I am fortunate enough never to have had personal experience of it, yet if you or Nigel were to commit that act, it would be worse than any physical pain. The fate you spoke of earlier—losing the ability to draw, or think—would be quite different.”

“Nathan Cullen,” said Edward. “That was the boy’s name. It was Nigel who wanted to amputate Nathan’s forearm.”

Barton was stunned speechless. “Wait,” he said finally. “Not ‘amputated’ but ‘wanted to amputate’?”

“The work was only completed with my assistance,” said Edward. “We are used to such operations. Cut at the joint and it is easily done.”

“Why do such a thing?”

“To remove the signs of suicide.”

Barton poured himself another cup of claret. “I don’t understand,” he said, staring into the dark liquid. “Why had they to be removed?”

“Nathan was brilliant. He came to London from a country village to

make the most of his talents. Nigel and I enjoy your high praise, Professor, but there was no such patron here for him. I think we were the only people in the city with whom he could share his innermost thoughts. At least, Nigel was. I was somewhat envious of Nathan. His gift was as a writer, a very different field from my own, but still… Nigel, though, is more modest. He offered his admiration as readily as a puppy."

Barton threw back his drink, then refilled the cup. He was prone to perspiration. A drop fell from his forehead into the crimson wine, but he drained the goblet without noticing. Edward's eyes followed his teacher's actions absently.

"What I saw," he continued, "was Nathan Cullen lying face-up on the dissecting table with Nigel beside him attempting to amputate his left forearm. Nathan had cut deeply into the arteries of his wrist on that side, even immersing the wound in a bowl of water to ensure that the blood did not stop flowing. Nigel met my eyes. 'Nathan should not be a suicide,' he said. And if we did not make sure that others saw it that way, too, he would be denied burial in a church graveyard."

"Which was why Nigel…?"

"Nathan was seventeen. Many who reach that age become sceptical of religion, particularly if they have some intelligence. But he relied on God to the point of naïvety. It was hard to credit."

"You speak like an atheist."

"I am not strong-minded enough for that. To deny the existence of God is to lose the reason for life. But the Church is not God, even if Nathan viewed them as one and the same. Professor, when I die, I will gladly donate my body for the advancement of science. Let my fat feed Charlie, my bones be put on display; neither prospect bothers me. Better—infinitely better—to be of some use than to be food for worms.

"Nathan believed that a churchyard was a place of peace. He also believed that the Church's position was indisputable. A suicide was unfit for hallowed ground. To him, this position was not something one accepted or not—it was an injunction. And yet he killed himself. Nigel was trying to disguise it as a murder to ensure that he would be buried in a proper graveyard. He only meant to detach Nathan's left arm, but I advised him otherwise. Remove one arm only, and someone might see through the

deception. Remove both arms and legs too, and who would ever arrive at the truth?"

"Why did you conceal the body in the fireplace?"

"We intended to smuggle him out at night and leave him where he would be discovered in the morning. I thought the local graveyard might be suitable. Someone would be likely to find him if we left him at the base of a cypress tree. His case would be taken as murder, his identity investigated, his body sent back to his family and buried in the parish's cemetery. So thinking, we used the winch to conceal him behind the fire door. We did not expect to have to conceal another body there as well. Let alone discover a third."

"My fireplace has a way of multiplying corpses, it seems… . This boy, Nathan—what was it again?"

"Cullen."

"Nathan Cullen. Why was ink poured on his chest?"

"I don't know. Without asking the dead, I don't think anyone can."

Barton's hearing was not as sharp as Sir John's, but in the tone of his star pupil he detected something amiss. What his voice sounded like when he was lying the Professor could not say. Edward had never lied to him before—or perhaps he had simply never noticed… . When Edward had denied knowing anything about the boy in reply to the magistrate's questioning, that had been untrue; yet his voice at the time had seemed unchanged to Barton's ears. In his *I don't know* of just now, however, there had been something subtly different.

"'Asking the dead'—you mean the boy did it himself? Before slitting his wrist?"

"I believe so… . May I go and see Nigel now? Nathan's death came as a great shock to him. He also feels guilty about the amputations, done for Nathan's sake or not. He needs some support."

"You feel no guilt yourself?"

"About what?"

"Mutilating the body of a friend after his death."

"I see no reason for guilt on that score."

"What was the cause of Nathan Cullen's suicide?"

"I do not know."

"Perhaps I had better see Nigel too. To tell him not to blame himself."

“No,” said Edward. “Please. Not yet. Give him some time.”

There was a short silence.

“Did you save the blade with which the boy cut his wrist?” Barton inquired.

“Yes. A razor was on the floor. I have it in my room.”

“Let us take the razor to Bow Street together. It will go best for us if we tell Sir John the whole truth. We do not want him to waste his time searching for a culprit when there is none.”

“But then all our good intentions for Nathan’s sake will be for nothing.”

“Disguising a suicide as a murder is unlikely to lead to court proceedings.”

“I am speaking of his burial.”

“Sir John will surely take that into consideration too… . What family did the boy have?”

“His father died when he was young, and his only relations appear to have been his mother and elder brother. It seems that his brother—and the brother’s wife—were not well-disposed to him. His mother felt bound to take their side, and this was one of his reasons for leaving home.”

“Once we know that Sir John understands, you must make amends to the family. It will be painful, I imagine. You may become a target for invective and affront. Suicide and mutilation of the body will be difficult for them to abide. With no other outlet for their distress, they may direct it at you, reshaped into anger. Also, their bias against the act of dissection is probably quite strong. However well-meaning your motivation, I doubt his family will understand. So I shall accompany you, and share their censure. And no, I shall not launch into one of my sermons, only apologize. If the parish priest will not permit it, we may have no choice but to abandon the idea of a church burial.”

“I shall present it as something I did alone, without Nigel’s involvement.”

“Very well. I do have one more question: what was Al speaking furtively about earlier?”

“It was… Well…”

“Something you cannot tell me?”

“Something difficult to tell you. Al felt the same way. He left the decision to me.”

“What is it? I shall not be upset. Tell me.”

“We believe there may be one other who knew how the fireplace is constructed.”

“Who?”

Suddenly, there was a loud knocking at the door, which then swung open before Edward could reply. The red-faced man who stormed in was Barton’s elder brother and the owner of the anatomy school: the physician Robert Barton.

Unlike his potato of a brother, Robert was handsome and refined. In his curled wig and fashionable, striped, navy-blue jacket, he could have been on his way to the Palace. Physicians were, in fact, permitted audiences with His Majesty, like the nobility and officers in the Army and Navy. Surgeons, however, were considered on a par with barbers and not allowed even to enter the Palace.

“What have you done to me, Dan?” Robert demanded.

“Done? I don’t… ,” Barton stammered.

The latter had been indebted to his brother since they were young, and still relied on his assistance today. It was he who paid for the cadavers the grave-robbers brought in. Al kept all the records relating to dissection and research, and Robert audited the books closely each month.

Of course, in exchange for his financial support, Robert helped himself to the preparations his younger brother went to such pains to create, adding them to his collection freely.

When Edward was noticed in the room, he was immediately waved out.

As soon as he left, Robert opened the door to confirm that no one was in the corridor before voicing his complaints.

“You have undone a great deal of work!”

“What are you talking about?”

“You know full well. How could you steal the body of Miss Roughhead?”

“I did not steal it.”

“You bought it from grave-robbers. There is no difference.”

“You gave your blessing to my dealings with grave-robbers. Running this school would be impossible without them.”

“No one complains when the corpses are indigents or beggars,” Robert

said, echoing the magistrate's observation. "We are speaking of the daughter of a distinguished family!"

"An unmarried daughter who was six months pregnant. Quite scandalous, I should say."

"Yes, you fool! Therein lies the problem! I am their chief physician!"

"Is that so?" the younger Barton said lamely. He knew that his brother counted many important people among his patients, but not who they were. He had no interest in the matter.

"They say you detected arsenic as well?"

"Ah! I meant to tell you. We have invented a revolutionary test apparatus."

Barton had kept the device secret to prevent his brother publishing its details first as his own invention. Robert had already stolen much from him in this way. Barton was not a worldly man, but even he had noticed that he did the hard work and his brother reaped the glory. It was not a pleasant thought. Even worse, the test apparatus was Edward's invention. He could not allow his brother to steal Edward's research too.

"You have no idea what problems your meddling has caused."

"Who poisoned her?"

"She poisoned herself. Her father had become aware of her condition. Not knowing what to do after he reprehended her, she took arsenic."

"Poor woman! She must have suffered. If only she had known how painful arsenic poisoning is, she would surely have chosen a different method."

"Sir Charles came to me for advice, still reeling from the shock. I saw at once that the cause of death was acute arsenic poisoning. But suicide would mean… even you must know this?"

"The Church denounces it. She would be barred from burial in a church graveyard."

"And so I simulated a death from illness. But now you have… I am just back from Bow Street where I was summoned by the magistrate. Sir John, at a meeting with Sir Charles, had told him he intended to investigate whether his daughter's death was murder or suicide. Sir Charles had no choice but to reveal the truth and beg that the suicide be kept secret. Hence my own summons. I also told Sir John the truth. He understood the situation. The family's shame will not be made public. But I have been

humiliated in the Roughheads' eyes! That my own brother could do this to me… The trust I establish with my patients is vital to my work. I have sacrificed much to achieve my position. My connections to good society are __"

He broke off. "I heard there was also an unidentified young male cadaver," he now said. "One whose limbs, moreover, had all been severed. What is this about? Who dismembered the boy?"

"I do not know. That one took me by surprise as well." Barton decided to keep his pupils' doings to himself.

"And there is one more corpse, a third."

"Correct."

"Is it true that it was found on a dissecting table?" demanded Robert, sounding like a public prosecutor.

"Yes."

"What was it doing there?"

"I do not know."

"Whose body was it?"

"I do not know. His face was crushed, and he was naked."

"I understand the magistrate asked Dr. Osborne to perform the autopsies."

"Correct."

"Will he share the results with you?"

"A good question."

"Bah! I leave London for a few days and everything is turned upside down. If you hear anything new, be sure to tell me. Be *sure*!"

"I shall."

"And handle Miss Roughhead's body with care," he ordered irritably. "In fact, since I arrived by carriage, I shall take it to the Roughheads myself. Wrap the body up so that my driver does not see it."

At the magistrate's office on Bow Street, Daniel Barton and Edward were shown through into Sir John's chambers. They found him relaxing in an elbow-chair, wig off, with the strip of black cloth raised above his eyebrows. His eyes remained closed.

The room had no carpet, perhaps to allow him to distinguish better between footsteps.

Two life-sized portraits in gilt frames hung on one of the walls. The first

was of Sir John himself. He was depicted from the waist up, seated, dressed in black velvet with gold trim. His right hand rested on two books placed on the desk beside him. The narrow blindfold was above his eyebrows, just as it looked now. His expression was mild and friendly, but with a certain spirit to it.

The other picture showed a woman of elegant bearing in the middle years of her life. This, no doubt, was Sir John's wife, now deceased. The artist's signature could be made out as "Gainsborough," a popular painter at the time.

"Has Miss Roughhead been safely restored to her rightful place?"

"My brother conveyed her there."

"I heard from Robert that she committed suicide. That is one problem resolved."

"Have you discovered the identity of the other two bodies?"

"I have assigned investigators, but no reports have come in yet."

"Where are Miss Moore and Mr. Abbott?"

"Looking into the case of the faceless man. Officials in each district have been asked to check their records for runaways or missing persons meeting the cadaver's description, and Anne is collating their reports." Sir John sensed that Barton was about to speak, and raised his hand slightly to stop him. "I know what you wish to say. How can I assign tasks of this sort to a woman? It would be far from the first time I had received such criticism. Even His Majesty the King rebuked me when word of the matter reached his ears. There are many who would like to bring me low, and this would be a convenient pretext. But losing Anne now would be like losing my sight all over again. She is my niece by marriage—the daughter of my late wife's younger sister. After she lost both her parents in a carriage accident, I fell into the habit of allowing her to accompany me in my work. She is exceedingly perceptive and capable. Finding me without Anne at my side—as indeed you do now—is to find me without my eyes… . Please, sit wherever you wish. What have you come to talk about?" he asked, turning to face Edward. Barton began to speak, but the magistrate interrupted him. "No, I should like to hear from Mr. Turner directly."

"I found Nathan Cullen lying face-up on a table in our dissection room, having committed suicide by cutting his wrist," said Edward.

"Nathan Cullen?"

“The boy. This razor was on the floor.”

As Edward passed the object to him, Sir John stroked his hand. Edward pulled it back swiftly. “My apologies,” said the magistrate. “I was trying to read your hand.”

“I amputated Nathan’s arms and legs,” Edward told him.

“Why?”

“To make it appear that he had been murdered.”

“Why?”

Edward gave him the same account he had given the Professor: Nathan’s reasons for coming from Sherbourne to London. His great ability. His despair at going unrecognised for that ability. His poverty. His wish to be buried in a churchyard when he died.

The story had changed in one crucial way, however: in relating it to Sir John, he left Nigel out entirely.

Sir John allowed him to finish without interrupting. Echoes of the tale seemed to linger in the air even after Edward fell silent. The magistrate remained silent too, as if listening to a distant voice. His eyes were closed, but his face wore a more meditative look than before.

“I see,” he said at last. “The boy was a suicide, but in order to allow him to be buried in a church graveyard, you made it look as if it was by another hand. Amputating his limbs was part of that project. Is that an accurate summary?”

“It is.”

“Why, I wonder, would he choose the dissection room as the scene of his suicide? If he found the graveyard a restful place, would he not go there?”

“Who knows what was in his mind? I have given you only the facts I can verify.”

“What became of the severed limbs?”

“They are in my room, preserved against decay. I intended to wait until Nathan was interred, a presumed victim of murder, and then bury them alongside him. If his suicide is to become public knowledge, I shall give them to his family.”

“I need to examine them first. Bring them to me. If you run, you should be there and back in less than twenty minutes.”

When Edward had left, Sir John turned to the Professor. “And what do

you wish to discuss with me?" he asked. "There is something you have yet to reveal, I think. You are unsure how to proceed. Well, speak. Silence may at times say more than speech, but now is not the time for it."

"The faceless corpse," Barton felt obliged to tell him, "was also at the bottom of the flue."

Sir John smiled. "This is growing almost comical. Perhaps we should put on a show at Drury Lane. *The Resurrection Fireplace*."

"I should have told you immediately."

"Whoever deposited it there must have been familiar with the peculiarities of your fireplace. A valuable clue, Mr. Barton, but one you concealed."

Barton felt as if he were the focus of a piercing light from behind the man's closed eyelids.

"As I recollect, it was Edward Turner who claimed that the faceless cadaver was found lying on a dissection table by all your students together."

"Is that so? I forget."

"You are perspiring, Mr. Barton."

The Professor mopped his brow with a handkerchief. Sir John's sense of smell was also quite sharp, it seemed.

"Who was aware of how your fireplace was constructed?"

"All my pupils knew."

"And did you?"

"Not until they informed me… . However, Sir John, I am as guilty of concealing the matter from you as they are. If you punish them, pray treat me identically."

"When Mr. Turner returns, I shall ask him directly."

There was an extended silence, finally broken by a knock on the door.

Anne Moore entered, saying that she wanted to report on the unidentified bodies, before noticing Barton and falling silent.

"Have you found their names?" asked Sir John.

"Shall I leave the room?" asked Barton.

"No, you may stay and listen. Where is Abbott?"

"Waiting outside," she said. "The district reports have arrived. The full list of runaways and missing persons was extremely long. From it we eliminated the indigent and members of the labouring class, as well as those of the wrong sex, age, or body type. Finally, we narrowed the list down to

those who made their living with a pen, whether writing words or figures. We are not quite finished yet, however."

"Read to me what you have."

She produced a list of a dozen or so names and read it aloud.

"Mr. Barton, did any of them mean anything to you?"

"Not one."

Another knock came at the door.

"Sir John," Abbott announced, "Edward Turner has returned."

"Send him in."

Edward had hurried, it seemed. His face had a thin sheen of sweat on it. In his arms he carried a large jar, which he placed on the desk before removing the cloth that covered it.

"Anne, what do you see?"

"A pair of forearms," she told him, "severed at the elbow. They are immersed in preserving fluid and have gone white. The left arm has a wound on its wrist, perhaps three inches long."

Chapter 4

It was three weeks before Nathan was reunited with Elaine. His unfailing daily visits to Tyndale's bookshop bore fruit at last.

He was arguing with Farrow through the half-closed door as usual when a chaise drawn by a single horse pulled up outside the shop. The driver lowered the step, and a plump woman whom Nathan took to be somebody's nurse emerged. She then extended her hand to help the other passenger out. Elaine.

Farrow opened the shop door fully for them. Nathan took the opportunity to slip inside as well.

"How nice to see you again," Elaine said to Nathan with a smile that left the clerk with no choice but to hold his tongue rather than chase him away. She turned to her nurse. "This is the gentleman I told you about, Norma," she said. "My knight."

Norma inspected Nathan closely, frowning a little, then gave the faintest of nods.

"Now," said Elaine to Farrow. "I thought perhaps my book would be ready."

"Your timing is perfect, madam. I was just about to send a messenger to inform you that the work on your book is indeed complete. We insisted that the binder do it quickly. Ah, Mr. Evans," he added, seeing this person arrive just then. "Your *Robinson Crusoe* is ready too."

"We meet again, madam," Evans said to Elaine with an air of familiarity. Norma glared at him.

Tyndale handed Elaine her book, and Farrow gave Evans his.

While the nurse paid, Elaine boarded the chaise again, turning her gaze towards Nathan as she did so and, by it, inviting him to join her. Scarcely able to believe it was true, the young poet placed one foot on the carriage step. She smiled and nodded—at least, he thought she did. So he entered the carriage, and she indicated the seat opposite her.

The nurse boarded the carriage a moment later. Eyes fixed on Nathan, she sternly said, "Miss Elaine."

The carriage swayed into motion.

Noticing Nathan gazing at the red leather binding, Elaine handed him her book. "Can you read it aloud?" she asked.

Nathan opened it up. "*Je suis obligé de faire remonter mon lecteur au temps de ma vie où je rencontrai pour la première fois le chevalier des Grieux*," he read. Was his pronunciation correct? He was prepared to leap from the moving carriage at the slightest hint of mockery on her lips.

Instead, she said, "Your voice is very pleasant. Won't you read that to me again in English?"

"'I must take my reader back to the period of my life at which I first met the Chevalier des Grieux,'" read Nathan, translating as he went. The look of admiration that appeared on her face made him inwardly give thanks to his old parish priest, who had taught him French. A Frenchman might have objected to his accent, but it did not seem to bother Elaine.

They passed a tea-shop, and she ordered the driver to stop. "I shall have tea here while my knight reads aloud to me," she declared. "Norma, go home ahead of me in the chaise. You may return for me in an hour."

"Miss Elaine, I simply cannot—" The nurse put up some resistance, but eventually obeyed.

If coffee-houses were for men, tea-shops were for women. Supplied with a fragrant spiced bun and a cup of Bohea tea, at Elaine's request Nathan continued reading *Manon Lescaut* aloud, putting it into English as he went along.

"I have in truth very little French," Elaine confessed. "I intended to have my tutor translate the book for me, but this is much better."

The arrogance of the upper classes, who expected their every wish to be fulfilled as a matter of course, was something of which Nathan was keenly aware and strongly critical under ordinary circumstances. In Elaine's case, however, he did not find it objectionable at all.

By the time Norma arrived in the chaise precisely an hour later to collect her charge, the Chevalier des Grieux had eloped with the bewitching Manon to Paris, where the two maintained a love nest together despite pressing financial difficulties. Manon appeared to be secretly supported by a rich male acquaintance.

With some reluctance, Nathan held the book out to Elaine. "No—keep it," she said. "I shall come here every day. You must come too, book in hand, and read it to me."

"I shall be here without fail," he said.

"Where are you going now?"

“I must call at the offices of a certain newspaper,” he told her. “They are to publish some poems of mine.”

The real nature of the writing, and indeed of the newspaper, he carefully omitted—a minor concession to his pride.

In any case, Elaine showed no further interest. “Tomorrow, then,” she said, and with a final smile made her exit.

Tea-shops were where a more genteel sort of female patron socialized. He found this one far more agreeable than Matthew’s coffee-house, where men much older than him engaged in loud debate. The staff here were also much more courteous than at Matthew’s—although this may have been because his arrival with Elaine had given him some credit in their eyes. The looks he received from other customers, women all, were milder, too. At Matthew’s, he was treated as a tiresome minor, if not merely ignored.

The conversation of the women in the tea-shop was frivolous, reinforcing his feeling of superiority with each snippet he overheard. His most pressing task was to finish the satirical poem that Harrington had commissioned, but he returned to *Manon Lescaut* instead.

Two hours later, he had finished it. What a fool the Chevalier des Grieux was, he thought. The man forsook everything for the sake of a woman with no scruples whatsoever, and ended up in a New World colony.

But what if Elaine proposed that *they* run far away together? How would he himself respond? Although the prospect was unlikely, he thought it over anyway.

Elaine took an interest in him: that much was certain. Why else would she ask him to read to her every day from this book—which, though beautifully bound, was frankly rather disappointing on the page?

If only the tale were thrice its actual length! Reading aloud was more time-consuming than reading silently, and translating each sentence slowed the pace still further, but within a week des Grieux would be in the colony quarrelling with yet another man with his own designs on Manon. The Chevalier would then kill this rival and flee with Manon to a remote and barren place where her death brought the romance to its conclusion.

He resolved to finish his *Elegy* first. Then, once *Manon Lescaut* was done with, he would read his poem to her, a tale of love in a distant land between a noblewoman and a page. And Elaine, to her astonishment, would

learn how far superior a writer the unknown Nathan Cullen was to the renowned Abbé Prévost.

His imaginings grew wild, stretching in all directions. Modesty soon lost its place entirely in his reverie.

But anxiety grew alongside self-confidence. Would others appreciate the merit of his poetry? The idea that it might not be as accomplished as he thought was difficult for him to accept.

He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. His composition had been promised to Harrington by three o'clock. He had not yet written a word.

The sweet, even cloying mood of the tea-shop made it difficult to conjure up the sharp, cynical language required for satire.

Gathering his writing implements, Nathan got to his feet.

As he took his customary seat at Matthew's, he felt the staff's unfriendly gaze on his back.

Nathan had already published several works in Harrington's newspaper. Payment was a mere two shillings for each, but since he was otherwise living off his savings, even this income was more than welcome. The trouble was that the work ate into the time he could otherwise have spent on what he truly wished to write.

His bun and beverage at the tea-shop had been paid for, saving him one meal's worth of expenses. If he were treated to the same each time he met Elaine there, it would help a good deal—pathetic though he felt acknowledging the fact.

He struggled to concentrate on his work.

Having no interest at all in politics, Nathan had been unaware of the chorus of voices raised in denunciation of the corruption in Parliament, or that a man called John Wilkes was chief among them, until hearing as much from Harrington. The worsening of relations between the New World colonies and England; Wilkes's mustering of anti-government forces since his return from those colonies: Harrington gave him themes, and Nathan wrote on them, denouncing the government in the form of caustic verse.

Because the mockery was not genuinely his, the poems did not come easily, but he found that he did have a knack for well-crafted poetic satire—which had become something else he counted against himself.

He completed the poem for Harrington within the hour, then worked on

his *Elegy* until shortly before three o'clock when it was time to set out for the offices of the *Public Journal*.

Passing through Castle Street, he remembered that this was where Edward and Nigel lived. They were studying anatomy under a Professor Barton, with whom they also lodged. Excellent fellows, even if their occupation was slightly unsettling.

He gazed up at Barton's residence. What appeared to be a single long building viewed from the street was in fact two: Edward had told him that beyond the double gate lay a courtyard which separated Barton's elder brother's home on the left from the dissection school and Barton's own residence on the right. Students entered through the double gate, and there were two rear entrances leading to the lane behind, one at each back corner of the property.

Were they performing a dissection somewhere in that building now? Wishing he could peer inside, he walked on.

Nathan feigned confidence around the two of them, showing as little weakness as possible. At their first meeting, he had intimated that his work was on the verge of publication, but Tyndale still kept him waiting. Edward and Nigel never brought the subject up. No doubt they had gathered that things were not going well. Nathan's anxiety over his financial situation was another matter he was careful to keep private. He did not want pity. Every so often he would slip, revealing a sentimental nature in unguarded remarks like "If I die, bury me beneath a cypress in the churchyard," but he always regretted it later. He wanted to be thought a cynic.

Harrington's newspaper had its offices among the rookery of Gin Lane. Every building on the street was dilapidated, except for three: a pawnbroker, a gin distillery, and an undertaker's premises.

The sides of the lane were lined with filth and kitchen scraps thrown from the windows, and animals nosed among them for leftovers. It was not even three o'clock, but there were also people who sat outside drinking straight from the bottle.

The newspaper's rooms smelt of alcohol too. Despite its impressive name, the *Public Journal* had a staff of just three, including Harrington himself, who handled everything from writing to printing and sales. Nathan had not learnt this until after he became a contributor, and the knowledge was somewhat discouraging. Harrington had apparently hoped to engage

him as a sort of general assistant, but Nathan had no interest in the offer. He thought of himself as a poet and writer.

On his visits to the coffee-house, Harrington was generally well dressed, but in his own offices he was scruffy. “Excellent,” he said, scanning Nathan’s work. “This will be fine. Come, give me a hand.” Without giving him time to refuse, he descended to the basement where two employees were setting type beside an oily-smelling press.

“Mr. Cullen’s piece has made it in time,” announced Harrington. “Let us put it on page three. Nathan, would you care to try some typesetting? It should be a simple task, since you wrote the original.”

“No, I am afraid I have another appointment after this.”

“A shame. It would be a good experience for you, I think.” He began to set the type himself.

“… My fee?” said Nathan.

Harrington gave him two shillings. “Indict the government in stronger terms next time,” he said. “It need not be in verse. They are plotting to exile Wilkes again. He read your piece last week, by the way, and said there was much to recommend in it. He deplores the way that poverty prevents young people with bright prospects like you from making a name for themselves, and is intent on overturning our current way of doing things, in which a handful of aristocrats maintain their grip on governance in the name of the King. Don’t be afraid to be radical. The hearts of the people cannot be won with lukewarm rhetoric.”

Harrington clapped him on the shoulder encouragingly. Nathan put the two shillings in his purse and let himself out.

He headed straight back to Matthew’s, where he hoped to meet his two friends.

On the way, he recalled something he had read by Montesquieu: “Friendship is an arrangement by which we seek to exchange small favours for large ones.” His friendship with Edward and Nigel, too, had begun with small favours on their part. But they had never expected a large one in return. Perhaps lending Edward that book on heraldry had counted as a favour. Edward had returned the book the following day as promised, and Nathan had never expected anything else from him. Nevertheless, seeing them both was somehow comforting. He knew they were unlikely to let him

form a particularly close bond with them, but that, he told himself, could not be helped.

He still had not told them about Elaine. Having concealed the matter early in their friendship, it was now difficult to find the right time to bring it up. Nor did he wish to be teased about it. Nigel would be straightforwardly happy on his behalf, no doubt, but Edward? Nathan rather suspected that he would find the affair something to poke fun at. Edward had a tendency towards sarcastic quips, and sometimes recited lines from unexplained sources that sapped Nathan's confidence. "*Do not trust yourself, young dreamer! Fear inspiration like an ulcer; it is the drowsy delusion of a sick soul, the irritation of imprisoned thoughts.*" Or "*Love is a flower which must needs have thorns. But what is friendship? A turnip, nothing more.*" Who had said that one? He had read it in a book somewhere.

He was waiting at a table in Matthew's when his two turnips arrived. He chuckled and leapt to his feet, hugging Nigel and patting Edward on the back.

"Anyone would think you had not seen us in a decade," said Edward. "Why such emotion? We met just two days ago."

Nathan himself knew that he was excited for no particular reason. Most likely it was due to his arrangement with Elaine.

"I was paid today," he said. "Today shall be my treat."

All thought of room and board had vanished from his mind.

It was the middle of May.

The foliage in the parks and squares had a seasonal freshness, though the buildings still wore their coat of soot and the skies were blurred with dust and smoke.

He had finished reading and translating *Manon Lescaut* aloud, but before he could offer to read his own poetry, Elaine had given him another book to translate for her. This one, too, was bound in deep crimson French morocco, with a gilt border in the dentelle style. It was a French edition of Defoe's *Moll Flanders*—the book's lurid content had made the original difficult to obtain.

In London, theft was a felony. However trifling the amount, anyone found guilty of it faced the gallows. Only women who were with child could have the sentence commuted to extradition, which was carried out after the child was born. *Moll Flanders* described a woman who was caught

picking pockets in a crowd but escaped hanging at Tyburn for this reason. She gave birth in prison and before long was put on board a ship bound for the other side of the Atlantic, her baby torn from her arms. That baby was the titular Moll Flanders. When Moll escaped from the orphanage where she had been placed, she was rescued and raised by a wealthy mayor, in whose household she was treated as something between a maid and an adopted daughter.

"I read this years ago," said Nathan, frowning. "It is surprisingly immoral."

"So they say," said Elaine with a giggle. "I asked Mr. Tyndale to procure and bind a copy for me because I heard it was diverting. When I told my tutor to translate it aloud for me, she refused, and scolded me. The book has stood unopened on my shelf—until now, I hope, with your assistance."

After making his reluctance clear with a look, Nathan began to translate the story for her. Soon other patrons near their table were listening, stifling laughter and even nudging each other occasionally.

After an hour, Elaine's nurse arrived to put an end to their enjoyment.

"I hear there will be some kind of public unrest," said Norma in her Irish lilt. "We had better hurry home."

"Are you going to the coffee-house ?" Elaine asked Nathan. He had told her about working on his poetry at Matthew's.

"No, today I am due at the newspaper."

"You have finished a poem?"

"Not yet."

"A Shakespearean sonnet?"

"Older than that," he said, producing the manuscript of his *Elegy*. He did not want her to read what he wrote for the paper, but the *Elegy* he could proudly reveal as his own work.

Elaine scanned the poem briefly. "It is rather difficult to follow," she said, smiling uncertainly. "Harder than French."

"Come along, Miss Elaine," said Norma.

After helping her into the carriage, Nathan made his way to the offices of the *Public Journal*.

John Wilkes, that fierce critic of Britain's unprincipled administrators, had returned from exile in the colonies two years ago, whereupon he ran for

office and was promptly elected to the House of Commons. In due course, however, he was condemned to the King's Bench Prison for almost another two years. There he had continued his anti-government activities, and had been expelled from Parliament as a result, immediately after his release in April of this year. Nevertheless, he enjoyed wide support by the general public.

One week earlier, a member of the House of Lords had moved to repeal the decision to expel Wilkes from Parliament, but the motion had failed. The newspapers had eagerly taken up the cause, and the citizenry was brimming with pent-up anger.

Walking through the city, he could feel ferment in the air. In squares, on street corners, people were beginning to gather.

He arrived at the newspaper offices and handed in his poem. Harrington seized him by the arm. "We must away!" he cried. He and his employees had broken out the gin to fire themselves up. "Drink!" he ordered, shoving the bottle into Nathan's mouth.

Nathan felt the stuff trickle down his throat and kindle a flame in his stomach. "Go where?" he asked.

"To protest," said Harrington. "A march. Demanding freedom and justice! Smash the Parliament of Deceit!"

"I have little interest in—"

"You wrote that manifesto last week, did you not?"

As far as Nathan was concerned, he had only restated Harrington's own arguments with some rhetorical flourishes tacked on. But his editor was drunk and determined, leaving him no choice but to go along.

The crowd had swollen to hundreds, even thousands of people, and was headed for the Houses of Parliament.

"Reinstate Wilkes!"

"Repeal the expulsion!"

Nathan had no idea why people supported this Wilkes so strongly, or why they heaped such abuse on Parliament. The throng pressed in so closely that he could barely move, let alone extricate himself, and he was aggravated by the way this crowd shouting for freedom restricted his own.

Dark smoke rose into the sky.

"They're burning down the distillery!" someone shouted.

With cries of "Quick!" "Gin!" part of the mob changed course. Caught

up in the current, Nathan was forced to run with it. If he had stopped, he would have been knocked over and trampled.

People picked up buckets, jugs, feed troughs—anything that could hold liquid—from houses they passed on the way to the distillery. Arriving as the fire still raged, they surged into the cellar and filled their containers with gin. Some drank it on the spot. Some forced their way out with barrels on their backs. Nathan managed eventually to crawl out of the place himself. At least, he reflected, he had left the manuscript of his *Elegy* at the newspaper's offices, along with his writing materials, rather than carry them with him.

There was a roar like a powder magazine exploding. A column of fire rose up.

Later, he learnt that the still had burst in the intense heat.

Pickpockets used their wits to profit from people as they panicked and fled. Some of the mob took advantage of the disturbance to spread the fire to wealthy households. Before long, mounted police were on their way.

The King's men are being sent in too!

The rumour spread without any identifiable source, but the prospect of facing actual soldiers was alarming.

The magistrate's officers seized and handcuffed whoever was in reach, and pushed their captives into a wagon they had brought with them.

"Let me out!" yelled Nathan. "I have not done anything!"

But no one heard him.

Above the central arch of Newgate Prison was a bas-relief sculpture of Dick Whittington with his cat at his feet; one of the many tales still told about the legendary London mayor was that he had provided for the prison's renovation out of his own pocket. Nathan, however, failed to see the sculpture from inside the wagon, which passed through the gate once the portcullis had been raised. Whittington's funds turned the prison into a fine building, and it had been rebuilt on an even grander scale after burning down in the Great Fire of London, but the treatment of those immured there remained as grim as ever.

Nathan was taken from the wagon, stripped naked, and subjected to a humiliating search while a guard watched, before being put in heavy iron fetters. He was then escorted forcefully through the darkness, his shackles biting into his ankles with every step.

The candles and torches on the walls gave a little light, but Nathan felt as if he had gone blind. By the time they put him in a cell, his eyes had finally adjusted, and he could dimly discern the forms around him.

It smelt worse than a farmer's stable. There were no windows, so the odours that filled the place simply accumulated, pressing on one's lungs. Rather than pay the window tax, the administrators had chosen to let the inmates gasp for air.

Those already inside stirred like penned cattle, faces hidden behind unkempt hair so that Nathan could not even tell if they were male or female. The constables' sweep had caught too many, and prisoners were crammed into the space.

"Let's have your chummage!" shouted an old-timer.

"Cash or clothes, but pay up," another told the new arrivals.

Those who refused were beaten and kicked.

Those who had no money were stripped.

They went through Nathan's pockets and robbed him of a purse containing several shillings. His fetters had already robbed him of his freedom. Every time he moved, the chains clanked and he felt the bones in his ankles might break.

Some of the prisoners were left unshackled. Nathan later learnt that one could obtain this privilege by bribing the guards.

The three-tiered bunks attached to the walls were already occupied, leaving newcomers like Nathan to curl up on a floor that differed in no significant way from the bare ground outside. There was not even room to stretch out. Again, Nathan learnt later that only those who paid the guards for the privilege could use the bunks. Two shillings and sixpence a week would buy you the right to a bed—but not the exclusive right. Each was sold to two or three people at a time.

The guards were also at liberty to sell liquor to both inmates and visitors. As Nathan watched, the old-timers exchanged the money they had just extorted for food and drink and began to celebrate. Cards and dice were produced.

Lacking even the will to feel self-pity, Nathan could only blankly stare.

He was pushed aside, shoved close to a wall. There lay a prisoner wrapped in what looked like cleaning rags. Squashed against this unfortunate, he was shocked by the chilliness of his skin.

What time was it? He didn't know. The sound of snoring here and there suggested that night had fallen, but Nathan himself was unable to sleep. He heard the faint rustle of cockroaches, and fleas and lice were at work on him.

In the darkness, someone wrapped his arms around him from behind. The smell grew worse.

He spent the night unable even to turn over.

He felt as if he were marooned on an island, surrounded by beings with whom he shared no common language, a separate race from the people he was familiar with.

For breakfast, they were given stale black bread with a thin layer of mould, and a swallow of water to wash it down. Then they were turned out into the yard.

When they were taken back in at noon, the body against the wall had been removed, leaving only a stain that did not bear thinking about. It was time to eat again. Nathan was handed a tin plate with a few beans and a boiled potato on it. The potato had begun to go bad. Supper was more stale bread, another bad potato, and the day's final, meagre allowance of water. If you were still thirsty, you had to buy more from the guards. In fact, the guards could procure not just water but almost anything you wished—as long as you could pay. In exchange for this service, they charged several times more than the prices one would pay outside the prison walls, and lined their pockets with the difference.

Nathan was accustomed to frugal meals, but this was pitiful. At least the black bread sold in the market had been relatively fresh. All his money was gone, and he had no family to bring him anything.

After nightfall, someone grabbed him from behind again. When he struggled, the man began to throttle him. Fearing for his life, he stopped resisting, and was violated.

By day the prisoners were driven out into the yard, where gambling continued as the pastime of choice.

Some old-timers played a game of "ninepins," bowling a wooden ball at a group of nine stray children they used as a target.

Fights erupted over the tiniest of offences.

Nathan crouched in a corner, trying to escape notice.

He heard someone whimpering. Glancing to one side, he saw a scrawny

boy sitting there with his face buried in his knees.

Nathan put his hand on the boy's shoulder, which shook with sobs.

The boy looked up. "I've done no crime," he said, perhaps relieved that Nathan did not look menacing.

"Neither have I," said Nathan.

"'Ave you been sentenced?"

"Not yet. I expect to be released."

The boy shook his head firmly. "I'm innocent, too, but the court found me guilty. They ain't interested in the truth. They just do as they please… . I'm bein' transported. The ship leaves tomorrow."

He had a London accent. The back of his hand had been marked to show he was a criminal.

"There was a shillin' lyin' in the street. I picked it up. A man in fancy clothes saw me do it. He dragged me to the magistrate, sayin' as how it was his money."

"They sentenced you to transportation… for a shilling?"

"The judge did it out of pity, he said, me bein' still a minor. Thieves are usually hung. Doesn't matter how small the theft. But transportation ain't much better anyway. They use you hard over there—even strong men get worked to death. And I done nothin' but pick it up!"

"Was there no lawyer to argue your case?"

"Does it look like I 'ave that kind of money?"

Nathan was probably the first person prepared to listen to him, because he began to grow animated.

"The man who turned me in didn't need no shillin'. He just wanted to bully me. You could tell by lookin' at 'im that he was some rich man's spoilt son."

Nathan remembered the cold treatment he had received from passers-by when he first arrived in London. Refusing to give him directions, kicking his luggage… .

But there were decent people, too, like Nigel and Edward. He wondered where Edward was from; he had no London accent.

"The courts ain't good for nothin'," the boy declared. "Nothin'. The jury, the lawyers, the judge, they're all on the side of the rich. People like us are a pox to them. They need workers in America, the public's all for hanging, the jury just wants to get it over with—so when the courts are

dealin' with the poor, it's 'Guilty,' 'Guilty,' one after another. They wouldn't get no thank-you present from me if they found me innocent, so why bother? But when a rich man gets off, he makes it worth everybody's while. The rich can get to the jury, too."

The boy fell silent and looked despondently at the sky.

"God ain't watchin' a bit of all this," he murmured, and buried his face in his knees again.

That was the last Nathan saw of him.

At supper a few days later, he was served an unidentifiable hunk of fat along with his potato. Made from the suet around a sheep's kidney, one of his fellow prisoners informed him. Served every Wednesday by generous order of 'is Majesty the King. You can't eat it? 'Ad a more refined upbringing than that, did we? The man grabbed Nathan's piece and popped it in his mouth. Was this the one who came for him at night? He fought a rising urge to vomit.

Time passed, but events in prison merely repeated themselves again and again. He had sneered at Moll Flanders once; now he was just the same.

He felt that he had changed, become someone strange even to himself.

How long had it been when they called him out of the cell?

First he was made to wash himself with vinegar. Then he was escorted under guard to the Old Bailey, the court to which Newgate was attached.

The building overlooked a small square with stocks and whipping pillars where sightseers flocked in the hope of catching a glimpse of the offenders.

With each step Nathan took up the stone staircase, his heavy fetters rattled noisily, and hurt him when they struck the stairs. They had already made scars on his ankles that he suspected would never fade.

A dozen or so prisoners awaited trial. Every one of them was dirty, with long hair and nails. They must have washed, too, but the grime and stink of gaol had not come off. Their eyelids drooped, their faces had prominent chins and cheekbones.

Noticing his own fingernails, Nathan realized that he must look much the same.

His name was called and he was led inside the court to the defendant's stand.

To block the smell that came from the prisoners and protect themselves

from germs, the jurors held a little sponge soaked in vinegar to their nose or crushed a sprig of rue between their fingers. The judges and prosecutors, too, had bunches of vinegared herbs set before them.

Nathan had no idea what was going on around him.

The courts ain't good for nothin'. Nothin'.

The boy's words rang in his ears.

Nothin'. Nothin'.

A man dressed in a portentous wig and legal robes asked him his name.

"Nathan Cullen," he replied, hoping his voice was not shaky.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the judge, gravely surveying them. "Nathan Cullen was indicted in the name of the Lord Mayor of the City of London for participation in a riot. However, a later request having been received from the Lord Mayor that the charges be dropped, he is hereby released. Call the next prisoner!"

Had he heard amiss?

Released?

Back at Newgate, he was told by a guard that discharged prisoners had to pay the governor a fee.

"Eighteen shillings and tenpence for a felony, but as yours was only a minor offence, four shillings less. Unfortunately."

"But there *was* no offence," Nathan rasped. "I'm innocent."

"Innocent costs the same. If you can't pay, it's back inside with you." And he dangled the key to the fetters before his eyes.

Nathan felt himself grow unsteady on his feet, until another guard said, "Oh, we can let that one go. Already got his fee. Generous patron paid it for him and left."

He was rid of the iron fetters, but he was still unsteady. His first destination was the offices of the *Public Journal*. He would have liked a cup of hot tea or coffee, some unmouldy bread, but he could not eat out in his current state: his hair was as lousy as his clothing. And he hadn't the energy or the will to walk back to Shoreditch to change in his attic room. Gin Lane was closer.

Past gutters choked with rubbish, he traced his way down narrow streets until he arrived at the newspaper's address. The front office was deserted.

"Is anyone there?" he called, heading down to the printing room. This

was empty too. Even the smell of ink had faded, replaced by a dry hint of dust.

He sat down hard on the staircase. Too weak to support himself even seated, he slumped over sideways, then tumbled down the stairs.

When he came to his senses, he was lying on the couch in the front office.

"You have been through quite an ordeal, I think, Mr. Cullen."

The voice was not Harrington's. It was someone Nathan had only met twice, but he remembered the man well.

"Mr. Evans," he said. "Mr. Evans, wasn't it? We met at Tyndale's bookshop."

"Just so. I am surprised you remember."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Harrington?"

"My social circle is a wide one."

"Where is he? And everyone else?"

"The first thing for you is to make yourself presentable," Evans said.

Nathan sat up, but found himself so dizzy that moving would be impossible.

"Wait here," Evans said.

He soon returned with an assortment of food and beer, as well as one parcel that was larger.

Nathan bit into the white bread first, then gorged himself on the eel and mash that Evans had apparently bought at a stall outside. Each bottle of ale he drank in a single draught.

It was not until all the food was gone that he thanked the donor for it.

"Mr. Harrington's private room and privy are upstairs," said Evans. "Let us borrow them."

"Without asking? Are you sure?"

"He will not mind."

Nathan got to his feet and ascended the staircase.

There was no tub in the bathroom, only a large sink and mirror and a pot full of water. He did not recognize the face in the mirror as his own.

He stripped naked and washed himself from head to toe. Even after rinsing himself clean, he felt that a vague odour still rose from his pores.

On the shelf next to the sink he found a razor. A scarred leather strop hung from a hook beside it.

Nathan took the razor and ran it across the strop. Top to bottom, bottom to top.

He felt a turmoil of emotion inside him, but could not tell if it came from sadness or anger.

He touched the steel to his skin. Like a balm, its welcome chill sank into him. Here was a blade that, heated by the flames of humiliation, had taken shape under the hammer of hatred. He let it slide across his own skin instead of the strop, concentrating on the act.

The door opened without a knock and Evans came in, holding a parcel.

He put it on a stool, then took the razor from Nathan's hand and, folding it, placed it by the sink.

"Put these on," he said. "They are used, but they should be the right size." But before he spoke, he ran one finger along the lower edge of Nathan's shoulder-blade.

It made his skin crawl. In his mind's eye, Evans blurred into the prisoner who had attacked him in the night.

"Your old clothes we shall dispose of," Evans said. "They are full of fleas and lice. I have no wish to catch prison fever."

Elaine had bought him used clothes too, Nathan recalled. There had been good reason to accept them then.

"Was it you who paid my fee when I was released?"

"It was."

"Why do you treat me with such kindness?"

Now dressed, he slipped the razor into his pocket as he spoke.

"Who could simply look the other way while another man suffers?"

"Could it be… that Mr. Harrington asked you to care for me?"

Still keeping up his end of the conversation, Nathan put his hand in his pocket and wrapped it around the razor's grip, his thumb on the knob. If he pulled it out, pressing lightly with his thumb as he did…

He imagined himself licking the blade. Lips sliced off in a moment. Like lightning, a sudden tear in the sky.

It was a mystery to him how he could speak so calmly, even with a faint smile. Swinging the razor, ripping at whatever was within reach—that was what he really felt like doing. He was wearing only the thinnest coat of normality.

"Harrington heard that you were caught up in the disturbance and

thrown into prison. He was concerned about you. And so, well, I pulled some strings to have the mayor drop the charges and free you."

"You have the ear of the Lord Mayor?"

"You might say that."

Nathan's gratitude was leavened with a secret disappointment. He had been allowing himself to imagine that Elaine was the one who had arranged for him to be freed. Of course, it was better for her not even to know that he had been in gaol, even though he was innocent. He must make sure that she never found out.

"Yes, those clothes suit you well," Evans said. "You look quite the poet."

"Have you read my contributions to the *Public Journal*? They are not representative."

Nathan used the pen-name "N. Pym" in the paper, taking care to keep his real name private. When the world was introduced to the poet Nathan Cullen, he did not want them to make the connection to the provocative articles published there.

"I had an idea you would come here once you were freed."

"When will Mr. Harrington be back? The other two are also absent, I see."

"Harrington, yes… ," said Evans. "Shall we visit him tomorrow? He will not return here for some time."

Was he in hiding, in fear of arrest?

"I read the verse you left with Tyndale. And the ancient poem you discovered also. Let us discuss the matter downstairs."

They went down to the office, where Evans took a sheaf of papers from a shelf and placed it on the table.

"Ah!" Nathan smiled. It was his *Elegy*, just where he had left it.

"You copied this poem, I think. It seems to be of considerable antiquity. Where is the book from which you transcribed it?"

"I wrote it myself. It is not yet finished; circumstances prevented that."

"*You* wrote this?" Evans shook his head in disbelief. His mood appeared to take a slight turn for the worse. "You say you did not copy it from another source?"

"I did not. It is my own work."

Evans fell silent for a few moments, thinking. Then he changed the

subject.

"According to what you told Tyndale, the parchment poem you left with him was part of an old collection your father was given by his parish church."

"Yes. I found it in our attic after his death."

"Only that one poem? Nothing else?"

"As far as I know, that was the only one." Nathan felt a twinge of acquisitiveness. "If I were to search again more carefully, I might find others."

"I hope you do so."

"Mr. Tyndale seemed to suspect it of being a forgery."

"Yes, one can be deceived by items of this nature if they are not appraised very carefully. To my eye, however, that was an authentic work from the pen of a fifteenth-century churchman. I cannot believe that someone of a later age could have mastered the language of that time so fluently. The parchment was also old."

"You are perceptive."

"There was one page missing, of course?" A hint of teasing amusement was in his voice. "You take precautions, I gather."

"It seemed advisable, though I did think it might be rude not to trust Mr. Tyndale entirely."

"Will you show me the missing page? The poem was magnificent, but its overall design was difficult to make out with that part removed."

"I left it at my lodgings."

"Which are where?"

"A room in Shoreditch. However, from tomorrow, I mean to take up my habit of writing at Matthew's coffee-house again."

"Matthew's—the one that faces the small square with the fountain? I know it, although I have never patronized it. Very well: tomorrow, at around noon I shall come for you at Matthew's. Let us eat at a tavern nearby, and you can show me the page you removed. After that, we shall call on Harrington together. He is to be found near the Royal Exchange."

Nathan's return came as a great shock to Mrs. Barrett. "We thought you'd done a runner," she said. "Where have you been?"

Nathan began to ascend to the attic. She hurried after him.

The straw mattress raised above the floor was gone.

Mrs. Barrett tried to cover fluster with irritation. “We don’t want any burglars in here, so I took care of this for you. I did take out your rent, mind.”

Nathan shook the contents of the small leather bag onto his palm. Two guineas, three shillings, sixpence, and three farthings. “Even minus the rent, there should be more than this,” he said.

She had probably filched the lot, not expecting him to return, then quickly refilled the purse with whatever change she could scrape together when he had reappeared at her door.

Without wasting any words, Nathan produced the razor from his pocket and pressed the handle. The bright blade snapped out.

Mrs. Barrett bolted down the stairs almost as fast as if she had tripped and fallen, but he caught her from behind and put the blade to her throat.

“That’s all we have in the house just now,” she said. “I’ll make up the rest later.”

It was fortunate that her husband was out, drunkard though he was. Taking on both of them at once would have been too much for Nathan in his weakened state, even armed.

He made no reply, but neither did he move the blade from her throat. Finally Mrs. Barrett pointed at a pot on the shelf. Pulling her against him, he moved towards the shelf. She turned the pot upside down, and three guineas tumbled out.

On an impulse, Nathan grabbed her hair at the nape of her neck and with the razor cut it off, then let her fall forward onto the floor.

Pausing only to snatch up the money from the pot and run upstairs to throw his few belongings into his bag, he left the house.

He had had no intention of living in the Barretts’ attic any longer in any case. If Harrington was going to be away for some time, he could camp in the newspaper offices. That would save him rent.

With the razor still in his pocket, he made his way back to Gin Lane.

The days of two-shilling payments for his poetry were over.

At the deserted *Public Journal*, he sat on the stairs and gazed down at the slightly dusty printing press, considering his situation.

He spilled the contents of his purse into his hand and counted it, though knowing exactly what the sum would be: five guineas, three shillings, sixpence, and three farthings. How long could he feed himself on that?

Nathan, however, still hoped to make a name for himself as the discoverer of the mediaeval poem, followed by publication of his own poetry.

Crimson morocco binding with gilt dentelle border and gold leaf for the name on the spine: *Nathan Cullen*… .

The first copy would, of course, be presented to Miss Elaine Roughhead, personally signed by the author. A copy each for Nigel Hart and Edward Turner. One for Fr. Pelham and another for his mother. How surprised she would be!

If the other verse sold, his *Elegy* might sell also. That truly was a work fit to offer Elaine.

In dreams, the seventeen-year-old who sat on the staircase was a success.

But at present I am almost penniless.

His mother had seen no merit in the poet's craft. If he had stayed on at the legal office to which his school had introduced him, after seven years as an apprentice he would have started earning something; not much, but enough to make a living on. Such had been his mother's hopes for him. Without that extra push from the parish priest, he would still be doing that dull, unrewarding journey-work.

But London did not lack for dismal occupations, either.

Pure-finder, for example—collecting dogs' waste to sell to tanners. A barrel of dung fetched eight or ten pence, or perhaps even a shilling if it was of good quality. But to spend the whole day bent double scooping it up… A horrible thought.

A tanner's lot, if anything, was even worse. Their work began with hides bought from the slaughterhouse, still smelling of gore. These were steeped in lime-water until soft, then scraped clean of hair and flesh. The tanners then turned them inside out to remove the fat. The hide, still sticky and heavy, was steeped once more, this time in dogs' waste dissolved in water—which explained the connection with pure-finders. The smell was appalling.

Nathan had visited the leather market in Weston Street once, during the time he spent as Elaine's reader. Her books had sparked his interest in how leather was prepared for bindings. The finished product was magnificent, but its provenance, the work of turning hide into crimson leather, was a

stew of blood and stench: he had watched the hide being treated with dung before it was soaked in tannin and finally dried over a fire. Residents of the city kept well away from leatherworkers. As Nathan had turned to leave, covering his nose and mouth, one of them had called out to him: "Want me to tan your hide, too, son?" And he had thought suddenly, *What a wonderful idea—using my skin to bind a book after I die.* Dyed deep red, adorned in gold leaf, it would be beautiful, even if its beauty derived from a foul process. Surely God would not object if the body in his coffin were missing a small portion of its skin.

With a sigh, Nathan returned to his current, penniless circumstances.

A mudlark, for example. That was what they called the people—mostly children or the elderly—who rummaged through the silt of the Thames at low tide for flotsam to sell. Scraps of coal and iron, nails, bits of rope, bones. Buyers would pay one penny for fourteen pounds of coal chips. Or five pounds of iron. Or three pounds of bone. A mudlark could collect things all day and make only thruppence. This might be enough to escape starvation, but the unhealthy conditions meant that many of them fell ill. And with no money to see a doctor, illness might be fatal.

There had been a mudlark in Nathan's cell in Newgate—a boy of seven or eight who had been caught sneaking onto a charcoal barge to steal from it. He swore that even prison was better than scavenging. His vocabulary had been very limited. Spending each day stirring through the mud of the Thames, hardly ever speaking to anyone else, he had little chance to enlarge it.

Such was God's will.

But God would offer even that wretched child salvation in the end. If he were buried in a churchyard and prayed for by a priest, his soul would be received in Heaven.

Nathan had almost never questioned the teaching of priests. What traces of doubt he did feel he pretended not to notice.

He went up to Harrington's room on the second floor.

The bed was simple, but better than a palliasse in an attic. And compared to his prison cell, it seemed fit for a king.

Edward and Nigel, too, had said that their work involved some terrible smells, he recalled, still thinking about the tanners.

Most people took a dim view of dissection: this they had told him too.

Physicians enjoyed high social standing and the respect that came with it, but surgeons were considered distinctly inferior, and dissection was seen as something quite repulsive. “Even though it is the most important tool we have for understanding disease,” Nigel had grumbled while Edward smiled ruefully.

When I die… , he thought again. *I would not mind Edward and Nigel making use of my body. If it is that important. Being cut into would be tolerable if it were by those two.* As long as the leftovers were buried in a churchyard afterwards.

He thought again about his hide being tanned and used to bind books.

It sounded profane… .

But was it wrong? Why? Why should God disapprove of whatever use he made of his own skin? And yet he felt a trace of guilt. Why?

After kneeling in prayer on the floor, he lay down on Harrington’s bed. Freed from fear of being assaulted, he fell into a deep and restful slumber.

Habit from his time in prison woke him early, but when he remembered that he could sleep as long as he wished, he stretched luxuriously and closed his eyes again.

He awoke refreshed. A large clock stood on the bedside table, and its hands stood at 3:27. The idea that he had slept into the afternoon startled him, but in fact the clock had simply stopped. There had been no one to wind it.

Even so, had he slept too late? Had Evans grown tired of waiting and gone home?

He hurried into the bathroom to make himself presentable, then swept up his writing implements and left the building. He was still unsteady on his feet and short of breath. The razor was in his pocket. It had become like an amulet, something to be carried at all times. The violent side that had been aroused in him made it indispensable.

Things continued that day just as they had before he was imprisoned, almost as if the spell in gaol had not happened at all. A bowl of hot frumenty at an open-air stall, and then Matthew’s.

He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. 11:43. He was on time.

He ordered a coffee and spread out his writing implements, but before taking up his pen he scanned the newspapers laid out at the coffee-house. Public events held no interest for him, but he hoped to find someone

advertising for staff. If possible, he wanted work as a writer. If not, perhaps a legal office where he could put his education to use… . But nothing he saw appealed to him.

His razor-waving mood had subsided… or so it seemed to him. He was glad of it. He could not press a blade to anyone's neck in his current state, no matter how incensed he might be. Not even if his purse were stolen, and with it all his meagre savings. He must keep his money on his person at all times: this was the lesson he had learnt from Mrs. Barrett's actions. If his purse were taken by a pickpocket, things would be desperate. Every so often, he reached down unconsciously to make sure it was still there. His hand inevitably touched the razor as well.

The thought occurred to him again: he had been released just yesterday. The night before last, he had still been in that terrifying cell.

"Well, now," said Evans, standing before Nathan's table. "Are you feeling somewhat livelier? You seemed at death's door yesterday. I see your colour has not yet returned."

The waiter arrived to take his order, but Evans waved him away. "We are just leaving," he said, then paid Nathan's bill along with a sizable tip. "Come," he told Nathan.

"We have not seen you in quite some time, sir," said the waiter to Nathan, expression unpleasantly solicitous. The same man had spoken to him only moments earlier. Nathan was simply getting the crumbs of a hospitality aimed at Evans, who with his smart appearance and wig and light powder—his evident wealth, in other words—was clearly someone the waiter hoped would be a regular patron.

"Mr. Turner and Mr. Hart sometimes favour us with their presence," the waiter said. "They have been quite worried about you."

Did they know he had been in prison? Nathan froze at the thought, but the waiter's next remark reassured him.

"They thought you were ill, or perhaps that you had left London. They asked if I knew anything, but of course I had no answer." The man stared at him. "You look quite drawn, sir. I see it was illness after all."

Nathan and Evans took a private room in a tavern. The feeling of Evans's finger tracing the line of his shoulder-blade came to him again, ringing out a warning: *Do not lower your guard*.

"I am in thrall to you," Evans told him. "Your Elegy—it is truly superb.

I should like to be your backer."

Was this a guardian angel sitting there?

Do not lower your guard, he reminded himself, letting his hand brush the razor in his pocket.

"What is it you offer specifically?" he asked, as businesslike as possible. "And what do you seek from me in return?"

"My hope is to help you fulfil your gifts."

"Will it open the way to publication? Have you spoken to Mr. Tyndale?"

"It seems he has not read your work closely yet. I read it through first. The mediaeval poem and your own verse."

"Will you recommend me to Mr. Tyndale?" Nathan pressed him quickly.

"First, the *Elegy*—you must finish it. I shall cover your expenses for the duration. I cannot offer luxury, but let me see… I shall give you ten pounds. Finish the poem before the money runs out. While you do that, I shall work on Tyndale, and see to it that he reads the poetry you left with him. If he reviews it properly, I am sure that he, too, will recognize the parchment poem as a genuine work of that period. A valuable discovery… . What is it?" He peered into Nathan's face. "Is ten pounds insufficient, perhaps? How much time will you require to complete the work?"

"I am considering what manner of man you may be," Nathan said. "Why should you want to support me like this?"

"But I told you already. I am moved by your talent. Every artist needs a patron. I shall enjoy the honour of having discovered and nurtured a prodigy. However"—he raised a finger as if in warning—"you must tell no one."

"Of what?"

"Of any of this. The poem you found is precious. If a less savoury character were to get wind of it, he might inveigle you into parting with it. So, until Tyndale and I bring it before the public, do not speak of it to anyone. The same goes for your *Elegy*. Do you understand?"

As Evans pressed the point home, something menacing showed for a moment in his eyes. "You do not yet appreciate all the dangers to which London is home."

But I do, thought Nathan. I spent perhaps a month or more in a prison that was a condensed edition of every danger London has to offer. Burglars,

footpads, highwaymen, sharpers, murderers, rapists, blackmailers, whores, and assorted others, from boys who merely picked a coin up off the ground to those who were as innocent as myself—all jumbled together. However unwillingly, even a babe in arms would learn all manner of wickedness after a month in there.

As if reading Nathan's mind, Evans said, "You must not think that you know London just because you spent a while in Newgate." He lowered his voice to a near-inaudible level, although they were the only two in the room. "The real schemer will fawn and then deceive. Perhaps you have made friends since arriving in London. Those friends might be good-natured people. You come to trust them, speak unguardedly to them about many things. Your friends, not with malice but through simple carelessness, repeat these things to others. Those others tell others yet, and in this way the news spreads. Who can guarantee that no ill-intentioned individual will be among those who hear it? What you possess is of great value."

Of great value. Nathan had used the same words himself. To Edward and Nigel.

"Have you already spoken of this to someone?"

"Yes. Two friends. They are pupils of Professor Barton at the anatomy school. They board there, they said."

"Students at the Robert Barton School of Anatomy?"

"Yes. They were the first friends I made in London. Their occupation is somewhat unsettling, but they are kind-hearted. I do not believe they will spread the news any further if I ask them to refrain from doing so."

"No, were you to make such a request, they would only conclude that the matter was important. Say nothing from now on. Let them forget."

He had shown Elaine the manuscript of his *Elegy* as well. But she had barely read it—had simply given it a glance and called it harder than French.

Elaine. Would he ever have another opportunity to see her?

He longed to meet her, to embrace her. No—he wanted the marks on his ankles to fade before they met. The leg irons had gouged into his flesh, at one point becoming pustulent, perhaps causing permanent scars. At night those scars revived the memory of the violation he had endured in gaol, bringing such shame he could have bitten off his tongue.

Their food was brought in. Nathan gasped.

The broad pewter dish was piled high with boiled pigeon meat ringed by cabbage, carrots, and turnips. The whole was practically drowned in butter sauce.

And this for one person!

Smoke-stained London was not known for fresh produce. This was the sort of cuisine that made the French laugh and jest that the English must do their cooking in their stomachs. But it was the first such feast Nathan had enjoyed since coming to the city—perhaps the first, indeed, in all his life.

When the platter was empty, a cake followed for dessert. The delicate Swiss roll with whipped cream and melted chocolate filling was like the smile of an angel. Nathan's wariness softened like the chocolate.

"Where is the page you removed from the poem?"

"Here."

"'*Francis Lovells warriours fortune fel*…'" Evans read a phrase aloud. "Lovell was an ally of Richard III, as I recall."

"Yes. A warrior who fought and died for that cruel, rickety king at Bosworth."

"Not so. Lovell raised his army in revolt against Henry VII only after Richard died in battle."

"Oh, was it then?"

"'A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse,'" recited Evans. From Shakespeare's *Richard III*. "Furthermore, Lovell did not fight to the bitter end. When he realized his attempt to avenge Richard in battle would not succeed, he fled."

"Is that so?"

"There is no shame in not knowing. Despite the fame of Richard III, few today recall the fate of his allies after his death. Of course, 'Godes servant Thomas Howard' was more knowledgeable, as a contemporary witness."

"Are you a scholar?"

Evans laughed heartily, as if he had heard an outrageous joke. "I suppose I have some learning."

"You do seem to enjoy reading."

"Reading is a pleasant diversion, but I lack the sort of literary talent you enjoy. Now, let us away to call on Harrington."

The Royal Exchange was one of London's most famous sights. As

usual, its courtyard was packed to overflowing with people.

There were 160 shops lined up facing the colonnade, selling goods both English and from farther afield: France, Spain, and Italy, of course, but items imported from the distant Orient were also on display. Refined porcelains and carpets, silk, perfumed oils, various accessories, and even glass eyes and ivory teeth were on sale. Separate stalls sold the cheaper daily necessities.

The crowd of customers was also of varied provenance. Mingling with the locals was the occasional Dutchman in a tasselled hat, a Spaniard in a short cape, or a merchant from the Levant. The inevitable pickpocket and bag-snatcher also worked the throng.

At first, Nathan wondered if they would indeed be able to find Harrington in this confusion. His concern proved unnecessary, however.

Harrington was high above the crowd, and very easy to see.

His hands and face poked through holes cut at the centre of two boards clapped together, and eggs or stones were being lobbed at him.

"You helped me," said Nathan. "Can you not help Mr. Harrington also?"

"Out of the question," Evans said. "He is the publisher of a notorious newspaper. He evaded capture during the riot, but some days later was arrested for inciting it and was sent to Newgate. You were not cellmates, obviously. He is still serving out his sentence. At his trial, he was sentenced to five days in the stocks at two hours a day. The rest of his time he spends in a cell. A rather lenient punishment, in fact. Many are left in the stocks for ten successive days until half-dead by stoning. Harrington is serving his last day as we speak."

"Will he then go free?"

"No, he will be confined. For months, perhaps, or years. When he is released will depend on the mood of His Majesty."

Harrington was responsible for Nathan's imprisonment, but, oddly, he bore no grudge against him. Was it because of the pathetic figure he cut up there?

A bell rang noon. A handful of guards removed the fetters from the stocks and bundled Harrington back into the wagon for transporting to the prison. Both of his ankles bore the marks of leg irons.

The sound of chains rang inside Nathan's skull, and he sank to the ground.

When he revived, he was in a swaying carriage, leaning on Evans's shoulder.

"As I suspected, you are still weak in both body and spirit," the latter said. "Small wonder, after a spell in prison."

Nathan was disappointed with himself, thinking he had recovered more of his old vigour.

"The stocks must have been too vivid a reminder. Have no fear: you shall never go back to prison. But neither can you return to the *Public Journal*, for you would be tormented by the memory of those stocks, of Newgate. You have borne experiences that could drive a man mad. I cannot leave you on your own. You must rest, as my guest at home."

Chapter 5

"Just the arms. Very well. What about the legs?" asked Sir John.

"I threw them into the Thames," Edward replied.

"Why?"

"Because the ankles were a physical record of his humiliation."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nathan was in Newgate for a time. Completely innocent, but… Deep marks remained on his ankles from the leg irons he wore there. They were cruel wounds in any case, and they reminded Nathan of his shame and loathing at having been in gaol. He even claimed that he wished he could cut out the scars and discard them. I had intended to wait for a chance to bury the legs with him in his grave, but it occurred to me that most probably he would not even want something on which the memory of prison was incised. If I disposed of them instead, in Heaven he would be free of these painful reminders… ."

"What were the circumstances of his imprisonment?"

"A month and a half ago—no, it was longer, I think—there was a riot, as you will recall. Nathan was caught up in the disturbance. It seems that the officers dispatched to the scene simply seized anyone within reach and threw them into prison."

The magistrate nodded.

"Nathan was not even given an opportunity to plead his case. He spent more than a month within Newgate's walls, forgotten, before he was finally released. Sir John, it seems that the conditions in Newgate are abominable. Were you aware of this? There must be reform."

"No doubt. But our conversation has lost its course. You said the boy came to London from Sherbourne, I think. What was his address in Sherbourne?"

"I do not know."

"When did you become acquainted with him?"

"I met him some three months ago, in the graveyard behind St. Paul's."

"The graveyard?"

"Sir John, I say this only because you know it already, but—we obtain cadavers for our anatomical research through illegal means."

"Let us pass over that without comment on this occasion."

“In exchange for the use we make of cadavers, Nigel and I sometimes lay flowers on their graves.”

“Nigel? Ah, the boy Abbott praised as a draughtsman.”

“Flowers on their grave?” interrupted Barton. “I am surprised to hear that, Edward. It is most unlike you.”

“It is my concession to Nigel’s sentimentally sensitive ways.”

“And?” urged the magistrate.

“Nathan asked us the way to Shoreditch. He seemed forlorn. Nigel drew him a map. I borrowed a book from him, and we arranged to meet the following day at Matthew’s, a coffee-house, so that I could return it. Nigel and I often visit Matthew’s after work. Nathan took a liking to it, too, and doing his writing there became an almost daily custom. Nigel and I go only two or three times a week, but we always found Nathan there when we arrived. When he saw us, his face would light up and he would urge us to sit with him.”

“His writing, you say?”

“He was working on a poem. It was in the English of a bygone age—very difficult. He seemed to have hopes of publication. And he also wrote for a newspaper.”

“Which one?”

“That he did not say.”

“Did he have any connection with a particular publisher?”

“He told us that he planned to take some work he had already completed to one… . As I recall, it was a bookshop that also published its own titles.”

“What was the shop called?”

“I cannot remember. He had something else to leave with the proprietor, he said—something of great value.”

“And what was it?”

“A poem written by a churchman some centuries ago, as he claimed.”

“That could indeed be valuable. The right specimen might fetch thousands of pounds. A fortune.”

“That much?”

“Can you not remember the name of the shop? You have invented a device to detect arsenic, yet your memory fails you here?”

“When a topic interests me, I can recall every detail of it. Ancient poetry, however, is not such a topic.”

“Anne, call Abbott.”

When Dennis Abbott arrived, the magistrate spoke to him directly. “Go to Mr. Barton’s residence and bring Nigel Hart here.”

“Nigel had nothing to do with the matter,” Edward objected. “Pray leave him out of this. He is still distressed by Nathan’s death.”

Sir John fell silent, as if listening to Edward’s voice as it lingered in his ear. “Abbott, bring him here,” he said finally.

The magistrate then continued his questioning.

“You say Cullen asked you the way to Shoreditch. What was his business there?”

“He had arranged board and lodging in the neighbourhood.”

“With which household?”

“I do not remember.”

“Did you and Cullen become quite close?”

“He seemed to have no friends in London except Nigel and me.”

“What did you speak of when you met?”

“Nothing of consequence.”

“He told you that he wanted to be buried in a churchyard, as I recall. Was this wish so strongly expressed that you felt obliged to make his death appear to be murder, even if that meant amputating his limbs?”

“It was not a wish he expressed on one isolated occasion. One sensed it in the things he said.”

“Severing limbs to simulate murder. This is not a notion that would come naturally to many.”

“Severing the forearm was necessary to hide the wound on his wrist,” said Professor Barton. “Yet if only the forearm were removed, suicide might still be suspected, and so all four limbs were amputated. An entirely natural idea.”

“I remember telling Nathan inwardly as I was doing it: ‘This stigma of yours shall soon be gone.’”

“The ink on his chest—why was that there?”

“As I mentioned earlier, I do not know.”

“Sir John,” said his assistant. “Forgive the interruption, but our examination revealed a discolouration on the fingers of Cullen’s right hand.”

“Describe it for me in detail.”

Anne Moore peered at the hand in the jar of preserving fluid. “The index finger, middle finger, and ring finger are faintly stained at the tip,” she said. “A light blue… . Lighter, I suspect, than it was originally, the colour having faded in the preservative.”

“Really?” asked Edward, taking the jar from her to see for himself.

“You failed to notice this, Mr. Turner?”

“Well, I was doing the legs, so—” he began, then stopped.

The magistrate took up the thread at once. “You were doing the legs. Who was doing the forearms? Nigel Hart, I think.”

“Yes.” This came from Nigel himself, who had entered the room just at this point. “It was I. I undertook the deception. Edward only assisted me.”

“What are you doing?” hissed Edward.

“It will be all right,” murmured Nigel.

“You have to…”

The others could not catch the end of the sentence.

“Don’t worry.”

“There was no need for this!”

“But…”

“Shall I remain outside?” called Abbott through the open office door.

“You may enter,” said Sir John. “Close the door after you. You returned more quickly than I expected, Abbott.”

“I ran into Mr. Hart just outside. He had come to present himself rather than wait to be summoned.”

“I just cannot let all the blame fall on Edward,” said Nigel.

The latter gave him a look of marked disagreement.

“Mr. Hart,” said Sir John. “What was your reason for disguising the death as murder?”

“Because suicides are not permitted burial in a churchyard.”

“But false homicides have my officers waste their efforts searching for a culprit who does not exist, leaving them no time for the violent crimes that do occur. Others involved are made uneasy and anxious. Did you not consider this?”

Nigel mumbled an apology, eyes lowered.

Edward put his arm around his shoulders. “The sign on his chest,” he whispered to him, “was not meant for you. It had a different meaning.”

“Sign on his chest?” said the magistrate sharply. “A different meaning?”

“I fear this is a matter that only the three of us—Nathan, Nigel, and I—would understand,” Edward said. “Are you conversant with heraldry, Sir John?”

“As much as the average man, I suppose.”

“The book that Nathan lent me when we first met was an illustrated treatise on heraldry. It became a sort of private knowledge between us. An oval, for example, is called a ‘roundel.’”

“There is nothing arcane about that. The word is perfectly common.”

“A silver roundel is called a ‘plate.’ A gold one is a ‘bezant.’”

“And a red roundel is a ‘torteau,’ I believe.”

“Yes. A green one is a ‘pomme.’ When I found Nathan’s body—”

“Edward,” interrupted Barton. “What you tell Sir John now had better be the whole and accurate truth.”

“I was the first to discover Nathan,” said Nigel. “His wrist was cut deeply, and he had immersed it in a basin of water to prevent the flow of blood from stopping. His body had lost its warmth. And…”

“And?”

“On his chest was a blue roundel.”

“Someone had drawn it there?”

“A blue roundel is called a ‘hurt,’” Edward said, clasping Nigel’s shoulders to encourage him. “The spelling and pronunciation are not the same as Nigel’s surname, but similar. Nigel believed it was a message to him, blaming him for his suicide. I told him that it may have meant just the opposite—a last sign of affection—but he continued to blame himself.”

“Why should he do that?”

“If I could only have been of greater help… ,” Nigel murmured.

“We suspected,” said Edward, “that Nathan chose death after his poetry went unrecognised and he became destitute. There was the shame of prison, too. Had we noticed earlier, perhaps we might have helped him. Nathan’s self-regard was too strong to ask for pity directly, I think. Our own lives are far from luxurious, but we could at least have shared with him what bread we have… . At any rate, since his death was supposed to be treated as a case of murder, any evidence implicating Nigel was unwelcome. However, we had no time to wipe it off. As a quick solution, I poured ink over it.”

“Only moments ago you said you knew nothing about the ink.”

“I was afraid of implicating Nigel by revealing what I knew. Now,

however, I know that the sign did not have that import. I apologize for lying and shall not do so again."

"Are inkpots kept in the dissection room?"

"They are."

"Nathan Cullen, therefore, began by drawing a 'hurt' on his chest, then prepared a basin full of water, lay down on the dissecting table, and slit his wrist?"

"We thought so too initially, which is why I concealed the roundel with more ink, but in fact this cannot have been the case. Miss Moore, pray tell Sir John again what the tips of Nathan's fingers look like."

"The tips of three fingers are stained."

"Are the balls of the fingers stained too?"

"They are not."

"An unnatural result indeed," observed the magistrate, moving his fingers across his chest as if drawing an oval there. "They ought to be stained to the upper knuckle, at least. Most inkpots have a narrow opening which would admit only one finger at a time. To ink in a rounded area, it would be faster simply to use one finger in a spiral motion. To judge by the discolouration on his fingers, however, he used three—but only the tips. Mr. Turner, earlier you said that he was not accusing Mr. Hart, and that the sign had a different meaning. Pray elaborate."

"If Nathan sought to mark his chest using the tips of three fingers, the easiest thing to draw would be three parallel lines."

"What would that mean?"

"If the fingers were moved up and down slightly as the line was drawn," Edward said, demonstrating on his own chest, "the symbol would become waves. Sir John, you know what that is called in heraldry, I think."

"A roundel with blue and silver waves is a 'fountain,' as far as I remember," he said with a smile. "Remind me—which of us is making these inquiries?"

"Pardon my presumption."

"Cullen might have drawn a 'fountain,' then. To what end?"

"I believe it would have been a message to Nigel and myself."

"A testament could more easily have been written with pen and paper."

"Nathan would be telling us who his murderer was."

"Anne, examine the wound on Cullen's left wrist."

“The wound is a deep, straight line in the flesh.”

Professor Barton peered into the jar from beside her. “The artery has been opened remarkably well.”

“If it was opened by another, Nathan must have been immobilized,” Edward said. “Most likely with ether. The murderer rendered him senseless, cut into the artery, placed his wrist in a basin of water to keep the blood flowing, and then left. A murder made to appear a suicide. In that case, however, Nathan would not have died at once. When the effects of the ether wore off and he returned to his senses, he would have realized his situation. That was when he drew the ‘fountain’—to identify his killer.”

“Why not simply write the killer’s name?”

“Two possibilities occur to me. The first is that he was already very near death. Lacking the strength to write the name itself, he chose the simplest way to convey it. The other possibility is that he did not know his murderer’s name. He could have written in blood, but he chose blue ink instead. He had to, or the sense of ‘fountain’ would not have been conveyed.”

“Cullen drew the symbol knowing that you and Mr. Hart would interpret it correctly, then.”

“I believe so.”

“And can you, in fact, interpret it correctly?”

“I do not know who might have committed the crime. All I can say is that it would seem he had some connection with Matthew’s, the coffee-house. Matthew’s stands in a small square, facing a fountain.”

“Anne, you are recording this?”

“I am.”

“I can hear your pen. In that case, Mr. Turner, who changed the ‘fountain’ symbol to a ‘hurt’?”

“The murderer, surely.”

“Hoping that Mr. Hart would be blamed instead?”

“That I cannot say. Perhaps the killer returned to confirm that Nathan was dead, and noticed the fountain symbol then. I would not venture to guess whether he realized that it pointed at himself, but he would have judged it too hazardous to leave it as it was. Not having time to clean it off, he quickly drew an oval around the waves and coloured it solid blue.”

“Creating a design which you would see later and drown in ink,

thinking that it indicated Mr. Hart."

"Yes."

"I fancy that Cullen would have had difficulty sitting up in his weakened state. Where in the dissection room was the inkpot?"

"Nathan always had his writing implements with him. He must have had an inkpot on his person."

"Was that the one you used?"

"No, I used one kept in the room. The murderer would have taken Nathan's with him. It was not in the area around the dissecting table."

"Mr. Hart." The magistrate addressed him gently. "The dissection room was closed for the summer. Why did you enter it?"

"I am a light sleeper," Nigel said. "A noise in the middle of the night woke me up. Had I gone downstairs then, I might have been in time to… I was cowardly. I feared coming face-to-face with an intruder."

"What time was this?"

"I do not know."

"Did you not consider waking Mr. Turner and going downstairs together?"

"Edward was sleeping soundly. I did not want to disturb him. The noise might have been my imagination."

"Which is another of his reasons for blaming himself," said Edward. "But it was not his fault. I have often chided him for his anxiety over inessentials. As a result, he would have felt reluctant to ask me to come with him."

"I should have gone straight downstairs," Nigel muttered.

"I told you to put that behind you." Edward's voice was harsh. "Stop behaving like a helpless child! How many times would you have me say that you were not to blame?"

"I am sorry… ."

"Every time you say it was your fault, it forces me to blame myself as well. 'If only I had woken up!'"

"I, too, did not notice anything," Barton added then. "I slept deeply until morning—never imagining what my two pupils were doing below."

"Did that dog of yours fail even to bark?" asked Moore.

"Charlie? As a guard dog, he is far from ideal. Too old and feeble."

"His leg will never heal now, either," mumbled Nigel.

“Nigel,” said the Professor. “Was it you who proposed discarding Cullen’s legs?”

He met his teacher’s gaze with a startled look. “Why do you ask?” he said, almost in a whisper.

“Well, Cullen detested the scars from his leg irons. They were a stigma. Discard the legs, and his spirit would be free of the memory of suffering in prison. Edward claimed that these were his reasons for disposing of them, but the emotive language he used struck me as distinctly unlike him. You, on the other hand, might put things just that way.”

“It was me,” Nigel said, looking down. “The scars were monstrous. To treat someone young, and blameless, in such a cruel way! And so, when I heard that Edward was to take the limbs to Sir John, I asked him to dispense with them. I did worry whether doing so was also wrong, however. They say, after all, that on the Day of Judgement dismembered bodies will not be those that rise from the dead.”

“Mr. Hart, pray continue your account of actual events,” said Sir John.

“I could not get back to sleep, so I lit a candle and went downstairs. Finding nobody in the main dissection room, I went to the students’ one. Subsequent events were as I have reported.”

“I also awoke, suddenly,” Edward volunteered. “I heard a noise—it may have been the noise that woke me. I noticed that Nigel was gone. When he failed to return, I became concerned and went downstairs. The noise I heard was Nigel laying out the tools for dissection. What happened next I have already stated.”

“I wonder, Mr. Hart, if you remember the name of the publisher to which Cullen intended to show his manuscripts.”

“No, I do not.”

“Mr. Turner, permit me one further question. I understand from Mr. Barton that the faceless cadaver was not found on a dissecting table but at the bottom of the fireplace flue.”

“I appreciate your concern on my behalf, Edward,” said the Professor, “but I thought it best to be frank with Sir John.”

“Very well. It is as Professor Barton says. The cadaver was in the fireplace. Nigel and I had gone into the flue to retrieve the body of the pregnant woman we had concealed there, and we stumbled upon it then. As

for your next question, I know it already: why did we keep this secret from you?"

"As I recall it was you who assured me that you all found the man's cadaver 'quite unexpectedly' on a dissecting table."

"Yes. I did so of my own accord, and I explained my reasons to Professor Barton and the others later. The structure of the fireplace is known only to a select few. We would all have become suspects at once. I wanted the investigation to proceed without any such prejudice."

Sir John sighed and smiled ruefully. "Well, this is a problem. You are too shrewd for your own good, young man."

"Professor Barton also allows as much, at times."

"But that quality is exactly what makes Edward capable of great ingenuity," said his teacher.

"Very well, then: who *does* know the structure of your fireplace?"

"We five do—his pupils. The Professor himself was unaware of it. As long as it warmed the room, he had no interest in how it was made. The servants do not know either, I believe. Only a chimney-sweep would voluntarily crawl into a flue. In fact, even a chimney-sweep would be unlikely to clean so far inside."

"Confound it all," said the magistrate. "You and Mr. Hart have both hampered our inquiries into this matter with your unwanted interventions and concealment of important facts. Are you aware that to intentionally obstruct a criminal investigation is itself a crime?"

Barton was visibly shocked. "Sir John! None of it was done out of malice. They acted only for the sake of others. I beg you, do not treat these promising young men as wrongdoers."

"Mr. Turner, how did you know the way in which the fireplace was constructed?"

"How? Well, the baffle is hinged half-way down. Once I saw the way it could swing forward and back, the rest was obvious—I had read about Prince Rupert's fireplace before."

"Gentlemen. If you remember the name of either the house at which Cullen was boarding or the publisher with whom he left his writings, send word to me. In fact, do all you can to remember them. The development of the investigation depends upon it. We are unable yet even to inform

Cullen's family of his death, and with only 'Shoreditch' to go on, progress will be slow."

"What a long day it has been," sighed Barton as they left the magistrate's office.

"You must be tired, Professor," said Nigel. "Shall I look for a sedan chair?"

"Oh, I am not that far gone," he said, forcing a smile. "At forty-two I may not have the strength I did at twenty, but I fancy I am haler than you all the same. You look exhausted." He clapped his hands together. "Let us sup in a tavern."

"As your guests, Professor? That would be much appreciated," said Nigel, forcing enthusiasm into his voice.

"We live-in pupils must stretch our meagre wages as far as we can," agreed Edward in a similar tone.

Usually, the two of them had to fend for themselves at suppertime. They might buy something ready-made at the market, or perhaps dine at a cheap eating-house.

"My sincere apologies for the meagre wages."

"I jest, of course."

The sun had not quite set, but their shadows stretched long on the road.

A rafter of noisy turkeys wobbled towards them. The birds were raised just outside London in Essex or Kent and herded to market. During their journey they were shod in tiny leather boots to protect their feet.

A gaggle of geese followed close behind. Geese lacked the docility of turkeys and rejected any attempt to fit them with boots, so their feet were painted with tar instead.

Carts and carriages going back and forth on the road were obliged to avoid the livestock. Birds that strayed from their fellows were goaded back into line by the drover. As Barton and the others watched, they blocked the way of a sedan chair, whose carriers showered them with abuse.

"Do you suppose that Sir John will 'shoe the goose'?" Barton asked, gazing at the mud- and sand-encrusted legs of the flock. "Shoe the goose" was an expression then current in London for performing an apparently impossible task.

"Indeed I expect he will," said Edward with a smile.

They entered the tavern, which, being a renovated house, had a number

of private rooms on the upper floor.

After ordering a meal of cabbage stew and roast goose, Barton turned to Edward. “For the magistrate to get this particular goose shod,” he said, “it is important that you tell him all you know. I sense that you are still withholding something.”

“Before I tell the magistrate, Professor, I wanted first to tell you.”

“By all means.”

“It concerns the meaning of the word ‘fountain.’ One person does come to mind as someone Nigel and I alone might associate with that word.”

“Who?”

“It is not easy to say this, Professor.”

“Al told you earlier, I think. There is someone else who might know how the fireplace is built, but for some reason you are unwilling to tell me his name. Does ‘fountain’ somehow refer to him?”

“Neither Al nor I have any wish to accuse this person specifically. I hope you will not be vexed.” He hesitated before continuing. “What Al suggested to me was that the previous owner of the house is likely to have known of the fireplace’s structure.”

“Who that might be I do not know,” said Barton. “I only rent the building. It was my brother who bought it. If we ask him, I am sure he will tell us who owned it before. Why was this hard to say?”

“Professor, you are principally interested in dissection and experimental science, but I am sure you can imagine that before anyone makes a purchase as important as a large house he would have the building inspected thoroughly.”

Barton thought for a moment. “You mean to say that Robert knew about the fireplace?”

“That is what Al found it difficult to tell you. It had also occurred to me, but I did not like to raise your brother’s name. But, yes, even if he had never examined the fireplace in person, he may well have heard that it was of Prince Rupert’s design.”

“Perhaps my brother did know how it was made. But, Edward, surely you cannot mean to imply that he concealed that faceless cadaver there.”

“No. Just that he may have shared our knowledge about the fireplace. As for the meaning of ‘fountain’… Nigel, I am sure you remember. The day

after our first encounter with Nathan, we met up with him again at Matthew's."

"Yes," said Nigel with an awkward smile. "The fountain in the square outside had stopped, and when it started again, a passer-by was…"

"… Drenched." Edward turned back to Barton. "That was an experience that Nathan, Nigel, and I shared—just the three of us. I wondered, therefore, if by leaving the code word 'fountain,' Nathan meant to remind us of that passer-by."

"You speak of a 'passer-by' in general terms, but do you believe this person had some connection with Nathan?"

"That I cannot say. However, it was the same individual who might be the only other person familiar with the structure of the fireplace."

"You mean Robert? That is slander, Edward." The potato reddened.

"I have said only what I know to be true."

Barton let out a heavy sigh. "Let us separate fact from hypothesis. The index, middle, and ring fingers on the boy Cullen's right hand were stained at the tip. This is a fact."

"The stain must have been ink from when he perhaps used those fingers to mark a 'fountain.' This is merely hypothesis, I admit, but I think it quite plausible. And Nathan did not know your brother's name."

"… This stew is most unpleasant. Even Nelly's cooking is more palatable. Nigel, what has you looking so dispirited?"

"Nothing. I am all right."

"Remember? Your drawings impressed even that silent fellow," Barton said, baring his teeth to indicate who he meant.

Nigel smiled wanly. "It was a relief that he returned them."

"Where were we, Edward? The faceless corpse was at the bottom of the flue. This is a fact. The design of the fireplace is known to my five pupils. This is also a fact, I think."

"Yes. Your brother may also know it, but that is conjecture."

"Something you consider likely to be true."

"Yes."

"Still, that he should have "—Barton struggled to get the word out—"should have *killed* Cullen, or for that matter the man who has yet to be identified… this remains uncertain."

"Of course."

“If the boy did not know Robert’s name, they cannot have crossed paths again after that first encounter.”

“Perhaps not. We do not know.”

“Robert had no cause to kill him—no reason whatsoever.”

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the roast goose. Barton began to slice the meat, revealing the moist white flesh within.

“Now *this* beats Nelly’s cooking,” he said.

“Speaking of Nelly…”

“What of her?”

“She talks quite openly to me.”

“Her fondness for you is obvious. Your plate always has the largest cut of meat.”

“You noticed, sir? A rare honour.”

“I am not quite the dodderer you boys take me for. Nigel, today I shall give the largest slice to you. Your drawings of the foetus were masterful.”

“Rewarding me with food, sir?” He sounded amused. “You treat me like a child.”

“Now, Edward, on what matter has Nelly opened up to you? Confessed her ardour, did she?”

The Professor knew this was not what Edward meant, but he was reluctant to broach a subject he knew must be broached.

“Nelly counted Miss Roughhead’s nurse among her closest friends,” Edward said.

“Her nurse… . Ah, the Bow Street Runners mentioned her, as I recall.”

“Bray observed that had we taken the body of the nurse instead, there would have been no fuss. He also told us that she was so overcome by the death of her charge that she took poison beside her grave. You, Professor, then expressed some regret—saying that you would have liked to have the nurse’s cadaver too.”

“Indeed, indeed. I remember now.”

“Miss Roughhead’s nurse—her name was Norma—was Irish, like Nelly, and of course a Catholic. London has very few Catholic churches, and those that do exist are all but invisible, tucked away from prying eyes. If the Catholics were to grow too active, they would only be suppressed again, after all.

“Nelly met Norma in church. Despite her position with the gentry, it

seems that Norma did not put on airs, and was instead quite friendly to Nelly, who was her junior. When the two realized that they came from neighbouring villages, they grew closer still. Apparently, Norma sometimes mentioned sending money back to her elderly parents at home. Her father, it seems, was both ill and impoverished. If she only had the money, she would send for him and have the best doctors in London treat him. Something of that sort."

"And?"

"A short time before Miss Roughhead's death, Nelly met Norma at Sunday Mass. Norma looked extremely troubled. She let slip a few hints about being made to say that a 'black man' had done something to Elaine, but revealed no more. Even to pass this on was difficult for her. Nor did her mood improve after this confession, Nelly said."

"'Black man'? Do you mean that Miss Roughhead fell pregnant to a negro? Impossible! This is not the colonies, after all. Where would she even meet one? We have no slaves in London—although our chimney-sweeps and tanners are worked almost as hard."

"About six months ago, just when Miss Roughhead became pregnant, one of the slaves being transported to the New World fomented a mutiny en route and seized control of the ship."

"Yes, I recall the incident."

"The slaves on those ships are treated abominably," Nigel remarked with a flash of anger. "They are shown less kindness than animals."

"Are you an abolitionist, then, Nigel, with Edmund Burke?" asked Barton. Burke was another critic of the government quite as fierce as Wilkes.

"The commandeered ship was prevented from returning to West Africa by a storm, and it landed near the mouth of the Thames," Edward continued, his voice and expression showing no emotion. "Most of the slaves made their way into London, and were soon caught, but it is just conceivable that Miss Roughhead encountered one in the meantime… . When they were imprisoned, Burke and some like-minded people took on their case, and their trial is still going on—a trial to decide whether slaves are the property of their owners, or whether they have rights as human beings. These men were not prisoners of war, or debtors unable to make good on their arrears. They were simply living peacefully in West Africa

until they were hunted down and captured with nets by another tribe working for the slave traders. But merchants are not the sort to sit by and be stripped of their rights to the property they have obtained, and so the trial has not yet reached a conclusion."

"The foetus was unquestionably white."

"Yes. The strange thing is that Norma said she was *made to say* this. She was compelled to, against her will."

"Why did you not mention this sooner?"

"I did not keep it back intentionally. When Nelly told me the tale, I more or less ignored it as household gossip. I, too, noticed that the foetus inside Miss Roughhead was not of mixed parentage, but did not think it necessary to make anything of the matter; in any case, there was no time to. In the end, however, I decided that I must at least tell you, Professor."

"Sir John is the one you must tell, surely."

"No—I could not inform the magistrate without consulting you first."

"What does it have to do with me?"

"Miss Roughhead's physician was Robert, your brother."

"How did you know that? I was unaware of it myself until I heard it from Robert directly not long ago. And when he came in, fuming, he had you leave. You cannot have heard."

"Nelly told me. When she was talking about Norma."

"Ah, Edward… . You truly do know everything. Much more than I do. Even regarding my own brother!"

"Professor, this is a private room, but if you speak too loudly you may be overheard outside it."

The waiter came to take their order for dessert, which made Barton lower his voice.

"We recommend the Snow and Cream," the waiter said.

"Very good. That will do."

"It may take some time."

"Very well."

Once he had left, Barton leaned forward, chin in hand. "Miss Roughhead's nurse lied that her charge had been made pregnant by a black man. Or rather—was forced to lie. Who would do this? And to whom was she made to say it?"

"I do not have the facts."

“A hypothesis will do.”

“One thing nags at me about what Nathan told us.”

“I deduce from your hesitation that what you have to say may displease me. Nevertheless, I must hear it.”

“The bookshop to which Nathan took his poems… I cannot recall its name, but I know that it was where Nathan met Miss Roughhead for the first time. She was ill that day. Nathan did not grasp the reason for her illness, I think, but given what came afterwards, I believe that she was some three months pregnant at that time.”

Barton sat up straighter and urged him to go on.

“The two of them began seeing each other—by which I mean only that they met in a tea-shop so that Nathan could read books to her… in any case, I understand that Miss Roughhead was in good cheer. Her upbringing was sheltered. If, whether by a runaway slave or someone else, some violation of her person had taken place…”

“You mean, if she had been raped,” said Barton bluntly.

“Yes. In that case, surely she would not exhibit such composure. One would expect her to hide in her house, rather than tour the city with her chaperone. And when she visited the bookshop, she was alone. Unmarried, yet pregnant—and in good cheer, it seems. Two possible explanations suggest themselves. First, that she fell pregnant to someone she loved, and intended to marry. It is improper to have physical relations before any ceremony has taken place, of course, but such things are not unheard of. Second, that she was raped, but did not realize it. She may have been rendered senseless with ether or some similar agent, and violated while in that state.”

Their Snow and Cream arrived, a great glass dish reverently carried in. Pale yellow cream with scoops of whipped egg white scattered on top like islands, round as the serving spoon: it was a feast for the eyes too. The waiter distributed their serving plates and left the room.

Barton had somewhat lost his appetite.

“Nigel,” he said. “What do you think of all this?”

“I am not much for hypothesizing,” he admitted.

“The man who may have etherized and then abused Miss Roughhead was white,” continued Edward. “He forced the nurse to falsely claim that her charge had been molested by an African. Why? He had no chance of

marrying his victim. Perhaps his social standing was too low, or he was already married. To whom did he force the nurse to lie? To Miss Roughhead's parents. Even if, through innocence, the girl herself failed to recognize that she was pregnant, the nurse must have known soon enough. Eventually her mother would have noticed too. Her father would have been incensed. When he heard additionally that the man involved was an African, he would have confronted her in a fury. Might not the marks on her posterior be from a whipping?"

"You made a point of mentioning that my brother was the Roughhead family's personal physician. Why?"

"I have little respect for him," said Edward crisply.

"I have noticed as much."

"Dr. Barton is fraudulent," Nigel exclaimed. "He brags that the results of your research, Professor, are his own. Edward's, too."

"But even I," Edward conceded, 'will allow that the work we are engaged in could not have reached its current level without his financial support. Which makes it undesirable for the magistrate's office to view him as a suspect."

"I disagree," said Barton. "The truth must be revealed, wherever it may lie." But his words lacked conviction. As a source of funding, his brother was irreplaceable.

"As regards Miss Roughhead, we have no solid truth, only conjecture."

"If all conjecture were discounted, thought would come to a halt. Even your testing device was developed over a long period of trial and error."

"You may suppose that I arrived at this theory of mine solely due to my dislike of Dr. Barton. Indeed, I have no evidence. It is supposition, nothing more. Consider, though: as her physician, he would have had many opportunities to put Miss Roughhead to sleep and commit an act of that sort. Suppose he does so, and when her pregnancy becomes obvious, persuades Norma to tell Sir Charles that his daughter is carrying the child of a negro. The furious father beats his daughter, which becomes a motive for self-murder."

"Driven to suicide?"

"There is another, still more unsavoury possibility. An unmarried girl giving birth to a child of mixed race would be an even greater scandal. It is not unthinkable that her father gave her the arsenic—killed her himself."

Barton let out a little moan. Corpses he could cope with, regarding them simply as material for analysis, but murder involving blood relatives he did not even like to consider.

"Or perhaps her father, more concerned with the family name than his daughter's life, asked her physician to administer the arsenic," said Edward. "Few obstacles to this would have presented themselves."

The delicate islands of egg white were already sinking. The three diners had hardly touched them.

"The most likely explanation, difficult as this is to say, is that the physician who prepared the way for Miss Roughhead's suicide also poisoned her before the truth could come to light."

"There are no grounds for such an inference."

"Call it a flight of fancy, then."

"Why should the nurse obey the physician's orders and lie to her employer?"

"Money, no doubt. Remember what Nelly said. Norma was sending money back to her parents in her home village. Her father was bed-ridden and destitute. She vowed that if she could only afford to, she would send for them and engage the services of a good London doctor for her father."

Barton poked at one of the sunken islands with a spoon.

"The physician offers her enough money to bring both parents over and promises to help her father, and she accepts the bargain. Later, she is killed, to secure her silence. Just a flight of fancy on my part, but…"

He seemed unable to decide how to continue. Eventually, he said, "There is something we have been hesitant to discuss with you, much as we would like to, for fear of wounding your feelings."

"Well, what is it?"

"May we continue this conversation at home? It is no simple matter."

Chapter 6

He heard the key turn in the lock, and the door opened.

"Making progress?" Evans asked.

Nathan closed the book on heraldry he had been looking at.

Evans entered the room, carrying Nathan's dinner on a silver tray. Bringing meals and taking away dirty dishes, even dealing with the pot kept under the bed: Evans did it all himself, leaving nothing to his servants. Meals were one thing, but Nathan found the handling of his chamber pot insufferable. It made him feel under tight control.

The thin veal cutlet made an excellent meal, but Nathan had no appetite. He only sipped the glass of port wine.

"Eat," said Evans. He picked up the book, glanced through it, then returned it to the table. "Is this useful for writing poetry?" he asked.

Nathan had been thinking of Edward and Nigel. The work on heraldry had begun his friendship with them.

Friendship, that thing which some wit had compared to a turnip, now seemed like an exotic fruit, reserved for the tables of the privileged few.

A blue roundel was a 'hurt,' Nigel's last name was 'Hart'… not quite the same, but close enough for Nathan to think of the blue oval as a symbol of his friend.

"Concentrate all your efforts on the poetry," Evans said.

The best part of a month had passed since Evans had taken him in.

Compared to the landed gentry, who had vast rural holdings as well as mansions in the city complete with butlers and servants to tend to their every need, Evans's home was small and his servants few in number. To Nathan's eyes, however, it was the height of luxury.

If this was a house, then the Barretts in Shoreditch lived in a pigsty. Evans's residence was three or four times larger than his family home in the village. The front entrance led to a reception hall furnished with chairs for visitors and great porcelain vases from the Orient.

Nathan's room was on the second floor. It contained a canopied four-poster bed, a wash-stand with mirror, a large writing desk, a chest of drawers and a bookshelf. The selection of books was generous and varied. There was *Robinson Crusoe*, the volume in which Evans had been engrossed at Tyndale's shop; works by contemporary authors, such as *Tom*

Jones and *Clarissa*; and classics by the likes of Milton and Shakespeare (Nathan's own favourite). Evans, it seemed, was quite a reader.

"This is the guest room," he had said. "You can stay here." When he had left, closing the door behind him, Nathan heard the key in the lock. He ran to the door and twisted the handle, but it wouldn't budge.

Under the bed he found a chamber pot. So he was to use this instead of a privy? However luxuriously appointed, the room was just another cell.

The chest of drawers was stocked with clothing and undergarments. Evans had planned this confinement some time in advance. A shiver went up Nathan's spine.

Evans did have servants, but there did not appear to be a wife or children. Even so, Nathan was not asked to dine with him. When it was time to eat, Evans would bring him his meal personally, then inquire about his progress on the *Elegy*. The hearty portions of beef or lamb or mutton made him feel he was being fattened up for slaughter.

"My progress would be better at Matthew's," Nathan told him, cutting a sliver of veal. "Solitude in an unfamiliar room actually makes it harder to concentrate."

"Is that really so, I wonder?"

Everything Nathan needed was provided unstintingly. He lacked only one thing: freedom.

"I arranged this to help you focus on your writing, without your time being taken up by other concerns."

"A change of scenery is also necessary now and then."

"In that case, shall we set aside some time for walks?"

"I would prefer to go to Matthew's."

"You cannot work here?"

"No."

"But coffee-houses and the like are noisy."

"To a certain extent, it helps to be around others. Staying in this room all day is suffocating—hardly conducive to poetic invention. Also, I hope you will let me attend church on Sunday. The one in Covent Garden is ungodly."

"They are all much like that in London." Evans thought for a while. "How many people do you know here?" he asked.

"Apart from you? Mr. Tyndale… Speaking of whom, what has

happened to the poems I left with him?"

"Tyndale is waiting for the *Elegy* to be completed. The mediaeval poem you discovered is still being examined by a trusted appraiser. As for your own poetry, Tyndale did not seem to care for it greatly. He could not fathom what you were trying to express. It is too new, he said. You must not press him for a final answer, either. The impression a work leaves depends on one's mood while reading it. These matters must be given time. It were better that you not appear too often there, lest he feel rushed. But take heart: when he reads the *Elegy*, his opinion of you will soar… . Now, have you any other acquaintances in London?"

"Mr. Harrington."

"He will be in Newgate for some time yet, I think. Who else?"

Could he call Elaine an "acquaintance"? He had not seen her since his imprisonment. He longed to, but it was not possible.

He still had her copy of *Moll Flanders*. He had not kept his promise to read it to her aloud. Had she misunderstood his absence? Did she think he had just walked off with it?

He would have preferred to leave out her name, but there was nothing for it.

"I have a book I must return to the daughter of the Roughhead household," he said. "I should like to meet her to do so."

"Elaine? Which book? I shall return it for you. Any others?"

"Edward Turner and Nigel Hart. I can meet them at Matthew's. And I should dearly like to."

"Those friends you mentioned earlier? Live-in pupils at Robert Barton's School of Anatomy, I believe you said."

"That is so."

"If you really must write at a coffee-house instead of here, choose another establishment."

"Why?"

"As I warned you earlier, your parchment poem and the *Elegy* must remain confidential."

"And as I told you then, I have already spoken of them to my two friends."

"If you have kept your distance from them, they have surely forgotten."

"I do not understand why I must keep this secret even from them."

“But I explained why the other day. There are many dishonest people in London. I do not want your obvious ability to fall into the hands of another just as it matures. I am your patron—someone who will groom you, help your talent to develop. Do you understand?”

“You have no right to restrict my movements.”

“Then your chance of making a name for yourself is at risk. If I were to withdraw my backing, you would be left defenceless. Your ties to Tyndale would also be severed. Without my approval, he would drive you from the door of his shop.”

“In short, you are threatening me.”

“My word, no! Do not misunderstand me. I seek only to assist.” Evans thought for a while again, then offered a proposal. “I shall allow you to visit Matthew’s once, as a test. To discover whether that environment truly does permit you to put pen to paper. And I shall accompany you.”

“I mean to go alone—”

“I would not interfere if you should meet your friends there,” he interrupted. “Only be sure not to speak indiscreetly.”

“You will be spying on us?”

“I merely urge caution.”

“I reject your conditions.”

“Then write in this room.”

“I cannot.”

“Then I cannot vouch for you to Mr. Tyndale.”

They were talking in circles.

“I shall leave here,” said Nathan firmly.

“Very well,” the other replied with a thin smile. “Do so. A suit will be forthcoming from Tyndale and myself regarding your attempt to defraud us.”

“Defraud you…?”

“Tyndale does not realize it yet, of course. The evidence is in my possession.”

The final page of the old poem?

Evans never had returned it to him… .

Nathan had been mistaken about Francis Lovell, remembering him incorrectly as having perished at Bosworth, fighting for Richard III. Evans had noted the inconsistency, but the poem only said that his “*werriours*

fortune" had fallen. It did not explicitly say that Lovell had died in battle, and Evans had shown no sign of suspecting any forgery… .

"Francis Lovell did not fight in the Battle of Bosworth," Evans said, still smiling. "His '*werriours fortune fel*' in 1486, after he raised arms against Henry VII. And yet after the poem it says, '*Wroten bie Godes servant Thomas Howard the .iii. daye of Novembre in the .m cccc lxxx v. yere of our Lorde God*.' Do you suppose Thomas Howard, servant of God, had eyes that could see into the future?"

"Ah, in that case…" Nathan tried to conceal his alarm. "Someone may have written that part at a somewhat later date. Nevertheless, it remains an old poem of considerable scholarly interest, does it not?"

"A somewhat later date? Three hundred years later, I think, by someone called Nathan Cullen."

"No. I merely discovered—"

"Very well. I shall bring suit for fraud. The trial will be held in the High Court, but until the verdict is handed down, you will be kept in Newgate—"

"No!" Nathan interrupted with a cry that startled even himself. "Not Newgate!"

"We shall have to wait and see how the jury decide. I think I shall introduce your *Elegy* as evidence. That will establish that you had the means to forge poetry in an ancient form of English… ."

"I had no intention of maintaining the pretence forever."

Nathan had planned to reveal that the poem by "Thomas Howard" was his own once Tyndale accepted it as genuine.

Among the things his father had been given by his parish church were many leaves of blank parchment. Having mastered the language and script of an earlier century, Nathan had written several experimental poems in that style before selecting his favourite and copying it onto parchment. When he told the parish priest that he had found the poem in their attic, it had been half in jest. He hoped only to be praised for his talent: how clever to be able to make such a close imitation! But Fr. Pelham had failed to see through the ruse. On the contrary, in his excitement he had recommended that Nathan have the poem appraised by a professional, and sent a letter of introduction to Tyndale on his behalf. Tyndale had even replied with a letter of thanks, although clearly his actual attitude towards the matter had been less enthusiastic.

Nathan had grown ambitious. He decided that he would have Tyndale read the poetry he had written in his own name too. The bookseller would surely be impressed enough to publish it. It was not that Nathan's self-confidence had been unshakable. He certainly felt that his poems were at least no worse than most of those already out in the world, but he was aware that this might be simple vanity.

Even if the Howard poem were recognized as a forgery, Nathan thought, the matter might still result in acknowledgement of his rare gifts. And if, at the tender age of seventeen, he had been able to write well enough to deceive a discriminating member of the publishing world, word would surely get around. This, he had concluded optimistically, would allow him to make his debut as a poet.

"Tyndale will be furious. Your poetic ability is remarkable, to be sure, but your scheming is as childish as your age might suggest. You considered only a course of events in which all was in your favour, I think. If a scholar engaged by Tyndale had verified the authenticity of the poem, what do you suppose the repercussions would have been if you then revealed the truth? Did your thinking extend that far? The appraiser would have his own reputation to defend. You would be ostracised."

At times Nathan *had* become uneasy—uncertain of how to proceed. He had wondered if it might not be better to tell Tyndale the truth at once, but then feared that, if the latter had not yet read the poem, such a confession would only arouse anger. If he *had* read it, however, he would surely praise Nathan's flair for producing such a work.

"Not Newgate," he said again. His hand had found its way to the razor in its sheath.

Evans noticed and took hold of Nathan's wrist. He was not a large man, but his grip was unexpectedly strong.

The razor fell to the floor, where Evans scooped it up. He opened the folding blade into one straight line.

Nathan cringed.

"Good boy," Evans said softly. "These implements can be dangerous. You barely even have a beard," he added, lightly stroking Nathan's chin before using the tips of his fingers to trace the contours of his lips.

The fireplace at Matthew's was no longer stoked with peat. Nathan had

his manuscript spread out on a table, but he was so conscious of Evans's presence that not a word came to him.

Evans was one table away, in a seat that gave him a view of Nathan from behind. He had ordered a cup of coffee, and was pretending to be just another customer. Every so often, however, Nathan had the unsettling sensation of the older man's gaze on his back.

Poetry is not easily composed under surveillance.

The two had finally reached an arrangement before this visit. Evans would not press charges against him. Nor would he inform Tyndale that the poem was counterfeit. There was only one thing wrong with the forgery: a single 'V.' *Wroten bie Godes servant Thomas Howard the .iii. daye of Novembre in the .m cccc lxxx v. yere of our Lorde God*. If that 'V' could be obscured with a worm-hole or a stain, the inconsistency with "*werriours fortune fel*" would be concealed.

"Tyndale has been too distracted by other matters to read the poem properly yet," Evans had assured him. "I shall wait for my chance and, when it comes, alter the parchment directly. This will protect its authenticity. No one will notice. Even scholars are unlikely to see through it. So put it out of your mind, while you bring the *Elegy* to completion."

Nathan had finally begun to understand the true reason for Evans's interest in his *Elegy*. Once it was finished, he planned to have it copied in a fifteenth-century hand onto parchment of an appropriate vintage—a job, no doubt, he would impose on Nathan too—and present it to the world as another priceless discovery.

He has not the slightest intention of promoting me as a poet. At most I shall be mentioned as the discoverer of old manuscripts. And he says that Mr. Tyndale has little interest in the poems I signed my name to—the ones in the language of tomorrow… .

But he says he shall arrange for the publication of those poems too. After I place a completed Elegy *in his hands.*

Bait.

The offer of ten pounds to live on until the *Elegy* was ready had been withdrawn now that Nathan was living in Evans's house. He was given food and lodging, and even clothing when necessary. But he had almost no money that he could use freely. The five guineas, three shillings, sixpence, and three farthings that he had obtained from Mrs. Barrett had been

confiscated. Whatever he needed he had to ask for, and if Evans accepted the necessity of the request he received the necessary items. Today, Nathan was only carrying enough money for his coffee and a tip. He could not run away with so little to his name. Not that he had anywhere to go in the first place.

"Greetings!"

Nathan heard a new customer volubly addressing the proprietor and his staff as he entered the coffee-house.

"Mr. Harrington!" said Matthew, the owner himself. "You have been released? Splendid!" He spread his arms in welcome, but his expression was tinged with embarrassment.

Being sentenced to public exposure had made Thomas Harrington's name and face notorious, along with the newspaper of which he was editor, reporter, printer, and chief salesman. Instigation of an anti-government riot was a serious charge, and those who drew too close to such figures would attract attention themselves. But just as public opinion was firmly behind Wilkes, no small number of people supported Harrington and his crusade against the aristocracy. As the proprietor of a coffee-house, Matthew had no wish to attract the disfavour of any particular side, meaning that Harrington's arrival put him in an awkward position.

Then Harrington noticed Nathan and approached the younger man.

"You would scarcely believe how poorly I was treated," Harrington said after embracing him lightly. "How has it been with you? Did the lack of work cause you any difficulties?"

He was apparently unaware that Nathan had been imprisoned too. Nor had he seen him in the crowd during his time in the pillory, which came to Nathan as a relief.

"How are you occupying yourself these days?… Wait!" Harrington leaned closer, one eyebrow raised. "We have unpleasant company, I fear," he whispered. "Behind you—but do not turn to look."

"Unpleasant company?"

"A stockbroker-cum-usurer. Finds ways to profit from the vilest of schemes. Manipulates the market, too."

He raised one finger to his lips. Evans had risen from his seat to approach them.

"Good day, Mr. Harrington," said Evans. They shook hands. "You had

quite a time of it."

Harrington laughed heartily and urged him to sit down. "I had expected you to come to my aid more quickly," he said. "You are a cold fellow and no mistake."

"But I did all I could," said Evans. "Which is why your sentence was so lenient. Under normal circumstances you would have faced transportation."

"Which would have come as a relief to you, I imagine."

Nathan felt he was watching two beasts lock horns.

"I don't suppose you have any interesting ventures to commend? Nothing like the Pacific affair, for example?" asked Harrington with a meaningful smile. Then his expression changed. "Where do the profits lie these days? I hear that the slave trade is not what it once was."

"Margins have thinned as the source materials grow more expensive."

"And that trial has yet to reach a conclusion as well. Are slaves the property of their owners, they ask, or men with rights like you and me—ridiculous! Humans are hierarchical by nature. Those at the bottom seek to topple those above, but should they manage to take the place of their oppressors, they only end up oppressing others themselves."

"Is not the *Public Journal* in the business of fanning the flames of rebellion from below?"

"Finding myself at the bottom, it is only natural that I should call for the downfall of those above me. Incidentally, allow me to introduce this young man." Harrington placed his hand on Nathan's shoulder. "This is Mr. Pym, a contributor to my newspaper. Despite his youth, he is a writer of rare ability."

Evans duly offered Nathan a handshake. The warning in his eyes was clear: *Say nothing you will regret.* Nathan would have revealed Evans's deceptions on the spot—if not for the memories of prison carved on his mind. If he went against him, he would be sued for fraud. He would be returned to that prison.

Ah, if only he could stand up, confess his forgery to all within earshot, and beg their forgiveness. Could he prevent Evans from carrying out his threat that way? But no. Confession would not erase his crime. He would be sent back to Newgate.

"Is his ability actually so rare?" asked Evans.

"His satire is perceptive," said Harrington. "Pym, you must write more

of it for me. The *Public Journal* has been banned from publication, but I shall soon found another newspaper with a different name. What say you, Evans? Can I count on your investment in this venture?"

"Little profit in publishing, I fear."

"The *Public Journal* sold well. It will recover. No—I shall revive it. The more it inflames anti-government sentiment, the more popular it grows. And then the stock-market will rise or fall in ways we can predict." He leaned closer to Evans. "Let us revive our partnership," he murmured.

Evans changed the subject. "I cannot let your praise for the boy pass without comment," he said. "I had been hoping to find a promising, talented young man whose development I might guide. Mr. Pym, was it? Allow me to take this further, if I may."

"You will not regret it," said Harrington. "He is sure to enjoy success. Though young in years, he is well acquainted with the older forms of our language, too."

"Indeed? A good sign."

Evans raised one finger to summon a waiter and paid the bill for all three of them, including the tip. Then he tapped Nathan on the shoulder. "Would you care to accompany me?" he said. "Perhaps we can discuss your future."

Nathan realized despairingly that Harrington would not help him. The journalist's position against Parliament did not derive solely from a sense of justice. It seemed also to be for profit. If Nathan confessed his forgery, Harrington might even support Evans in bringing suit against him.

A shiver went down his spine as he realized the extent of Evans's stratagems. Evans had claimed that he had pulled the necessary strings to have Nathan released after Harrington had come to him with concerns about Nathan's predicament—caught up in the riot and thrown into prison.

But Harrington had not even known *about my imprisonment.*

Evans, on the other hand, had known. He had persuaded the Lord Mayor to have the charges against him dropped, paid the fee for his release from Newgate, and followed him to the offices of the Public Journal. What had been his aim? To recover the missing page from the poem by "Thomas Howard," and secure a completed version of the Elegy. Nathan knew that now.

Evans had seen through the Howard poem as soon as he obtained the

missing page. Nathan was living proof of its falsity. It made him shiver all the more.

Once I finish my Elegy, *will Evans… ?*

This was a man with influence over the mayor. Nathan had little understanding of what it meant to manipulate stocks, but presumably the mayor was also profitably involved in his schemes.

As soon as they left the coffee-house, Evans's expression became a scowl.

"You spoke of the matter to him as well?"

"Yes, when I was free to say what I wished to whomever I wished."

"Are you sure you wish to speak to me in this way?"

It was clear that Evans could no longer be bothered to dissimulate.

"Matthew's is too risky, just as I suspected. Harrington is a regular there. Write in your room from now on."

Nathan glanced at the fountain, then turned to look back at the coffee-house. He might never see his friends again… .

But he was not entirely helpless. Was there no way to escape?

The razor had been his only weapon, and Evans had taken it away.

His purse held only eightpence. If they had not run into Harrington unexpectedly, he would have used this to pay for his own refreshment. Evans had given it to him as they left the house, so that he might watch from a distance without revealing the connection between them.

If he fled, where would he go? He lacked even the funds to make the humiliating journey home. If he were caught begging, he would be sent to gaol; caught snatching purses, he would be hanged. The indigent, even those who had done nothing wrong, were made to serve on board warships. The life of a new sailor was little better than a slave's. No one would choose that fate voluntarily, so the press-gangs obtained recruits by force, using methods that amounted to plain kidnapping.

Could he beg Tyndale for help? Impossible.

What about Edward and Nigel?

If they learnt of the forgery, they would surely despise him too. He had no hope of assistance there. In any case, how could he get in touch with them?

But for the time being, at least, I am safe from Evans, as long as the Elegy *remains unfinished.*

Chapter 7

"Your preparations are at risk of falling into somebody else's hands," said Edward.

"What!?"

Barton started up from his chair by the fireplace in the dissection room, where they had retired to continue their discussion.

"I recently had cause to learn about the financial situation of your brother, Robert," said Edward hesitantly. "It seems that he is heavily in debt."

Nigel was with them in the room, but remained silent.

"How did you learn this?" asked Barton.

"Like you, Professor, your brother entrusts the management of his assets to the Temple Bank."

"My meagre savings are hardly worth the effort, but yes."

"The bank is alert to the financial status of its important clients," Edward said. "Of course, its employees would never reveal a customer's private affairs. In their line of business, trust is all-important. But just as Dr. Barton is important to the bank, so too are you to Mr. Hume personally. You know, I think, that he still feels indebted to you for helping Mrs. Hume during her difficult labour."

"They feel indebted to you as well."

"Indeed. They treat me with great kindness."

Jacob Hume was head of the Temple Bank, and lived with his wife on the third floor of the bank's premises. The president, a Mr. Cartwright, had a sprawling mansion in the West End.

About half a year ago, the Professor had paid a visit to the bank to transfer payment to a certain merchant in exchange for some rare animal specimens from the New World. Edward had accompanied him, to assist with practical details. Barton, for his part, considered Edward a very capable secretary.

The Temple Bank was located near Temple Bar. Too small to merit comparison with the Bank of England on Threadneedle Street, it was old-fashioned and unglamorous, but highly regarded nevertheless, with branches in Paris and Frankfurt also.

The entrance to the bank was usually watched over by Peter, a pimple-

faced boy of sixteen who was large for his age. Although not formally employed by the bank, he carried messages and ran errands for tips when he was not ensconced in a rickety chair. The Temple Bank he considered his territory.

Hume had been restless on the day of their visit. “The truth is, my wife is lying in,” he explained. “The midwife is with her.”

Hume was past forty—about the same age as Barton—but his wife was in her early twenties, and this would be their first child. Women customarily returned to their own family for their first delivery, but Mrs. Hume’s parents were deceased and she had no family home to go back to. Hume was devoted to his young wife after a long period of solitude.

Now anxiety showed in his face. “It is taking rather long,” he said. “Her pains started yesterday, but the child has yet to come. Mr. Barton, could I impose on you to look in on her?”

Barton had often assisted in his elder brother’s practice as a gynaecologist, so he had the necessary knowledge. Dissections, too, had made him intimately familiar with the foetus and its circumstances.

Enlisting another employee to take over the work at hand, Hume led his two visitors to the third floor. In the bedroom—now serving as a delivery room—a heavily pregnant Mrs. Hume lay groaning on a bed stuffed tight with horse hair while the midwife pushed at her abdomen, perspiring with the exertion. A chill wind blew outside the window, but the hearth was piled so high with bituminous coal that the very firebox seemed in danger of igniting. The room was like a smoke-house.

“This is Mr. Daniel Barton,” Hume said to the midwife. “He is here to help with the delivery.” He mopped his wife’s brow, squeezed her hand, and stirred the coals in the fireplace before finally leaving the room with obvious reluctance.

Reliant on experience and superstition, the midwife had rubbed a gold coin against Mrs. Hume’s lips, wrapped a snakeskin around her abdomen, rubbed butter where the child would emerge, and was currently pushing on her patient’s body with her entire weight.

Barton moved her aside—the resentment in her eyes at this slight!—and began to administer more appropriate treatment: rye ergot to induce contractions, cinnamon and anise water as a tonic.

Hume was outside the door praying, helpless before the mysteries of

childbirth.

"Push! Push! You mustn't rest!" urged the midwife. Barton silenced her, then whispered in Mrs. Hume's ear, helping her to establish a regular rhythm in which to push.

The woman was exhausted. Her contractions were weakening.

"We must force it out, sir," the midwife insisted. "You push her belly, and I shall pull the child."

"There is tartar emetic in my bag," Barton said to Edward. "Dissolve three grains in a cup of water."

Once this was ready, the problem was how to have Mrs. Hume drink it. As she was almost senseless from exhaustion, Barton told Edward to administer it mouth-to-mouth.

The midwife moaned at the unseemliness of it.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Hume vomited explosively.

"The cruelty of it! I know you, Daniel Barton! A corpse-carver! What have you done to her? Mr. Hume, you must send him away!"

Seeing the door open a crack, Barton met Hume's gaze. *Everything is all right*, his look said. The door closed again.

The vomiting spurred the muscles of her womb out of their torpor and her contractions began again. The pain was beyond the young woman's endurance.

"Edward, palpate Mrs. Hume."

"The child has descended to the pelvic outlet," said Edward. "Almost there."

When the top of the baby's head came into view, the midwife pushed the two of them aside, thrust her fingers in to seize the child by the ears, and attempted to pull it out by force.

"Do you want to tear its head off?" cried Barton, shoving her away. "Edward, as I taught you."

Supporting the baby's chin, Edward rotated it in the birth canal to help it descend further, then put his hands under its armpits and pulled it out in several motions timed to match the womb's contractions.

It was a boy.

Even after the birth, Barton clashed with the midwife as his attempts to apply the new science of gynaecology conflicted with the traditional knowledge she proudly maintained. When he told Edward to wash off the

blood and muck that covered the child's body with warm water, she protested strenuously. "The baby has yet to receive the sacraments!" she said. "This stuff protects him from the Devil. Wash it off, he says! The very idea!"

"You may be a Catholic," said Barton, "but the child, like his parents, is Anglican." He and Edward quickly dipped the baby in a basin of warm water to wipe it clean.

As Edward wrapped the child gently in a new piece of cloth, the midwife made her last complaint. "You mustn't wrap him that way," she said. "Lay him straight as a rod, and then swaddle him up tight, so that he can't move. His bones are still soft—you must stop his arms and legs from bending. Upon my word, these youngsters today are an ignorant lot!"

Edward was content to let her rant, but Barton lost his temper. "Will you stop nagging!" he cried. "Or I shall fit you with a scold's bridle!"

The disposal of the afterbirth occasioned further squabbling, but at least a healthy baby boy had been safely delivered. Barton's judicious intervention also helped the mother avoid puerperal fever, and she was back to her vivacious self in no time.

Since that day, the Humes had shown Barton the utmost affection and respect and quite spoilt Edward, while the midwife had spread tales of Daniel Barton, corpse-carver.

The baby had been named Daniel, after its benefactor.

"Mr. Hume must have found it very awkward," Edward said. "Without touching on the matter directly, he managed to convey a quiet warning to me. It seems that a fall in the stock-market has driven your brother almost to bankruptcy."

Of investment and speculation and the like Barton knew no more than a child.

"He has taken out loan upon loan, and appears to have offered the preparations as security for it all. Including the specimens in your possession. In his view, they also belong to him."

Barton was clearly shaken. "What should I do?" he asked his pupil.

"Mr. Hume was not quite so frank about the matter of security," said Edward. "He spoke more vaguely. Tomorrow or the next day, I shall ask him for details. Does the law permit your brother to mortgage your

preparations without permission? We must establish ownership clearly. Depending on the circumstances, a lawyer may be needed."

Barton should have resolved the issue of ownership before this. However, his elder brother had a trump card: the threat of cutting off his funding. Even if Barton established a secure claim to the specimens, without money he would be unable to continue his dissections, let alone create more preparations.

Robert was also dependent on his younger brother to keep the anatomy school functioning, and so in a way they each had a knife at the other's throat. Yet even if the school were closed, Robert would remain a hospital administrator and a member in good standing of society. He did not share his brother's fierce attachment to the school for its own sake. To take Barton's work and research from him would be to pull him up by the roots. His body might live on, but his spirit would die. Clearly, Robert had the upper hand.

Which was why Barton had hitherto chosen to leave things unsettled.

But if creditors were about to seize the collection, this was something that absolutely must be prevented.

Unfortunately, Barton was helpless where many of the rudiments of daily life were concerned. He had no idea even how to begin protecting the collection.

"When did you hear this?"

"Several days ago," said Edward. "It felt too rough-and-ready to repeat, and in any case these were only my deductions from Mr. Hume's vague remarks, so I was uncertain whether to tell you."

"Bring the claret from the kitchen. And tell Nelly she may take the evening off."

Edward disappeared into the kitchen.

"Edward!" Barton called after him. "Add a few drops of laudanum to that claret!"

"Do you have a toothache?" called Edward.

"I fear I shall not sleep otherwise."

"Just a little, then. Or it will poison you."

"I am a surgeon, I know the appropriate dosage."

He drained the cup that was brought to him in a single draught. "I shall

think on the matter of my brother," he said with a sigh. "It has been a difficult day. You must be weary. To bed with you."

His two pupils said goodnight and went upstairs. Barton leaned back in his chair.

Charlie was curled around his feet, tail wagging. Barton recalled Nigel's comment: *His leg will never heal now.* When the two constables had entered, he had used the dog to provide an excuse for the goriness of his hands. "I have treated you most unkindly, Charlie," he murmured, but the dog only wagged his tail harder.

Then the lazy old animal got to his feet. Bess had arrived. The gate outside cannot have been properly shut. Without even a look in Charlie's direction, Bess made straight for the bucket, but it was empty. Barton shooed her out and, while he was up, took a turn through the preparation room.

It was the exotic animals that caught the eye first: seal, panther, mongoose, crocodile… . But more important and certainly more numerous were the preparations that lined the shelves, systematically divided into groups. Some were dry, some wet; all used colour to indicate the organ or area of interest.

The collection was the result of twenty years of dedication to dissecting and preparing specimens. However, the most important and valuable items were all on display in the room at Robert's house that served as his cabinet of curiosities: Barton's wet preparation of the olfactory nerve, for example, with which he had proved that the first of the twelve nerve pairs extending from the brain-stem went to the nose. How he had laboured in its creation!

His brother had made off with other fruits of his research. Barton had revealed the interior structure of the testes by injecting mercury into a cadaver's *vas deferens* and then opening it to reveal the intricate maze of vessels within. It had been Barton, too, whose vivisection of a dog had shown that fat was absorbed not by the veins but by the lymphatic vessels. These results had all been published under Robert's name. Barton had received recognition only as a coldhearted vivisectionist.

There was a yawning gap between the two brothers' view of their relationship. Robert believed that, as long as he provided the necessary funding, the results of Barton's research and experimentation were his

rightful property. This included everything in the specimen room, about which, apparently, he felt not a twinge of compunction.

And yet, if not for Robert, who was eight years older than him, he might have ended his days a drunkard in the same Scottish village he had grown up in. Robert's urgent quest for social advancement had taken him to Edinburgh University, where he studied medicine and anatomy and became a licensed gynaecologist and surgeon. He had then moved to London and qualified as a physician. Opening a private practice, he had used the social graces he had acquired to insinuate himself among the upper ranks of society. On a visit to Paris he had witnessed a dissection and realized how far his own country had fallen behind in the study of anatomy. Upon his return, therefore, he had established a school of anatomy alongside his private practice, and sent for his brother to help run it. Barton's first responsibility had been the procurement of cadavers.

Barton had always enjoyed analysing the living—and dead—things around him. He assisted his brother, gradually began to perform surgical and gynaecological work, and eventually became an expert in anatomy and the art of creating preparations, despite being almost entirely self-educated. At the universities, the study of medicine still chiefly implied lectures on the classic medical works, which were of course riddled with errors.

Your preparations are at risk of falling into somebody else's hands.

Edward's words came back to him again and again.

Feeling the claret and laudanum begin to take effect, Barton headed for his bedroom upstairs. As he passed Edward and Nigel's room, he was seized by the urge to knock. Perhaps he could discuss things with Edward one more time.

He heard voices inside, but their tone was too low to make out what they were saying through the door.

Laughter?

Without warning, the door swung open.

"Professor Barton, can we help you?"

"Ah! Edward!"

"We heard your footsteps pause outside the door."

"Nothing important," said Barton, while Nigel poked his head around the door, looking worried.

"If it is the matter we discussed earlier that concerns you, I shall see Mr.

Hume tomorrow and learn the truth in full. We shall make sure that your preparations are absolutely safe."

"Thank you." He bade them goodnight, then trudged into his room.

Removing his clothes, he collapsed across the bed.

Geese with tarred feet tramped around him, and he fell asleep chasing them with shoes.

He had overslept. It was past ten o'clock. There had been too much laudanum in it after all. Head heavy with the lingering effect, he made his way downstairs to find his pupils already present. Four of them, at least.

"Where is Edward?"

"He went to the Temple Bank," said Nigel.

Nelly prepared a simple breakfast for him. He did not feel strong enough mentally to grill her about Norma.

The problem of the cadavers could be left to Sir John. Barton's most important task was to protect his work from his brother's creditors.

"I am off to the Temple Bank, too," he told them as he gathered his things.

"Wait for Edward's return, if you would," said Nigel.

"The trouble is my own. I cannot leave everything to him."

"Professor, please—he can be trusted with the matter."

"Oh, I know! For things of this nature he is more to be counted on than I am. But I must learn for myself how matters lie."

"What is all this about?" asked Clarence.

"I shall tell you later," said Barton. "Now—we had a bumper crop of cadavers yesterday, but today our cupboard, so to speak, is bare. Accordingly, there will be no dissections. Let us call today a holiday."

"But something may be brought in. We should be waiting, just in case."

"It is already far too light for that to happen."

"Sir John may send some news about yesterday's events."

His pupils were rather too lively, Barton felt. Excited by recent incidents, no doubt.

"Professor, what did you discuss with the magistrate yesterday?" asked Clarence. "Please tell us, too. Edward had already left when we arrived, and Nigel refuses to say anything without your permission."

How much could he divulge? It would be irresponsible to mention the

cloud over Robert. After giving it some thought, he said, “You must wait just a little longer. Nigel, will you accompany me?”

Left behind, Nigel would face a barrage of questions from his fellow students, none of them easy to answer. Nigel’s gratitude showed in his expression.

“Professor,” protested Clarence. “We are your pupils too. Edward and Nigel are our friends. Edward claimed that he knew who the dead boy was. He also said that he would tell us after discussing the matter with you. You have since had that discussion, I believe. I beg you, tell us what you know.”

Barton glanced at Nigel, a question in his eyes.

Without looking up, the latter nodded very slightly… or so it seemed to Barton.

“The boy was a mutual friend of Edward and Nigel’s,” he said. “His name was Nathan Cullen. A writer of great talent, I gather. The rest I am sure Edward shall report once our business at the bank is settled. Wait until then. Oh—and please put the catalogue of preparations in order.”

Barton and Nigel walked along the Strand towards Temple Bar without speaking. The uneven cobblestones breathed in the summer sun and exhaled heat, and the smell of the horses that pulled the carriages and cabs was distinctly stronger here. The cries of the vendors were as loud as ever. In a square, they saw a woman leaning against a mucky cow and selling its milk by the cup. Barton asked for two cups of syllabub. The woman poured some wine into a pair of mugs, added sugar and spice, then crouched down to hold them under the cow’s udders as she milked it. When she handed them over, they were full to the brim and as warm as the animal itself.

Barton also bought a muffin from the stall next door. “I ate just before we left, but your meal was some time ago,” he said to Nigel. “We do not want your stomach rumbling at the bank.” In truth, he hoped to cheer up his miserable-looking pupil; syllabub and a muffin were the best he could think of.

“You fuss like a grandmother, sir,” said Nigel. He looked half-way between laughter and tears. “But I *was* feeling thirsty.”

If Edward had been thirsty, Barton thought, he would have asked for a drink straight out.

They returned their empty mugs to the woman’s stall and went on their way.

“Thank you,” said Nigel, a few minutes later. “For bringing me with you. I would have been questioned mercilessly had I remained there. And I find the circumstances surrounding the amputation very painful still to speak about. Nor do I know if it would be right to repeat to others the suspicions that Edward voiced about your brother.”

The sound of hooves came from behind. They turned to see two mounted figures approaching—Anne Moore on a chestnut horse, Abbott on a bay. They stopped and waited for them to dismount.

“Sir John says that he wishes to see you, Mr. Barton,” said Moore. “We called at your residence first, but that talkative student of yours—Clarence, was it?—informed us that you were headed to the Temple Bank. It was easier than I expected to catch up.”

“Am I under suspicion?” asked Barton.

“By no means. And this is not a summons as a witness, either. He merely has some questions regarding the identity of the cadaver whose face was destroyed. He and Sir Saunders Welch sit as judges on alternate days, as you may know, and today happens to be Sir John’s day. He must be in court for the afternoon session, but he hopes to interview you before then. If your business at the bank is not too pressing, will you not accompany us first to the magistrate’s office?”

She spoke politely, but there was a certain force in her manner nonetheless. Barton sensed a conscious projection of authority—presumably a reaction against the general tendency to dismiss or mock her due to her gender.

“Very well,” said Barton. He did wish to see Hume quite urgently, but he could not ignore the magistrate’s request.

At Abbott’s urging, he mounted the bay horse. Barton had little experience of riding, but relaxed when Abbott took the reins.

“Shall I go ahead to Mr. Hume’s?” asked Nigel. “I could tell him that you shall be along later. We would not want him to leave the bank for some reason in the meantime.”

Barton turned to Moore. “How long will this conversation with Sir John take, I wonder?”

“Perhaps an hour. The court will be in session after that.”

“Nigel, tell Mr. Hume that I will be with him in no more than an hour and a half.”

Nigel's face showed visible relief.

To be summoned by the magistrate did not promote peace of mind even among those whose consciences were clear. Nigel had concealed what he knew about the boy's identity and the reasons for his amputated limbs, which, Barton surmised, made him even less inclined to meet Sir John. And Nigel was someone inclined to hide in Edward's shadow, anyway.

Arriving at Sir John's residence, Barton was shown into the dining room.

"My apologies for imposing upon you again—and while I am at my meal yet," said Sir John. The magistrate's eyes today were covered by the strip of black cloth, and in his voice Barton sensed both strictness and genuine warmth. "On the days I must sit as judge, my only free moments are at luncheon."

He told the maid to lay a place for his visitor, but Barton demurred on the grounds of having just eaten. Not, however, without some regret—the cooking appeared to be in an entirely different class from Nelly's.

"As you wish," said Sir John. "I am just finishing myself." He wiped his mouth with a napkin and instructed the maid to serve the coffee in the sitting room. "Or perhaps Professor Barton would prefer tea?"

Which do *I prefer?* Barton wondered as if for the first time, before concluding that he had no preference either way. "Coffee, thank you," he said.

They repaired to the same room as yesterday. At home, the Blind Beak could move as confidently as any sighted man, requiring no assistance. Even so, Miss Moore remained by his side.

The maid brought in a silver tray with three cups of coffee, then quietly withdrew.

"Our time is limited," Sir John said. "Let us begin with the main matter: the results of Dr. Osborne's autopsies. First, the faceless man. Professor, are you acquainted with a man called Thomas Harrington?"

"I am not."

"Do you read the *Public Journal*?"

"I have never heard of it before."

"You are fortunate, then. It is a vile publication. I am pleased, incidentally, to detect no insincerity in your answers."

"Is it true, then, that you can distinguish truth from falsehood in

people's speech alone?"

"I will be franker with you than most, Professor. It *is* true that my sense of hearing is far more sensitive than the average man's. Still, it is not infallible, and sometimes I fail to detect even a barefaced lie. No, I am not quite as fearsome as popular opinion would have it—although I refrain from correcting the record on that account, as it is useful for striking fear into the criminal heart. In any case, it was an easy matter for me to determine that you spoke truthfully just now."

"Who is this Thomas Paddington?— No, Harrington, was it?"

"Harrington is the man who publishes the *Public Journal.*"

"A vile publication, you said."

"It is an indefatigable opponent of oligarchy, but largely to increase sales. The rest of its pages are filled with writing barely worthy of the name 'prattle.' It has also been used to promote fraudulent schemes. What concerns us now, however, is why its editor's corpse was found in your fireplace."

"You managed to identify him even with no face?"

"You may recall that I ordered a list prepared of people reported missing or otherwise absent from home."

"I heard the list read aloud yesterday. Was the name Harrington among them? I confess I do not recall them all individually."

"No. The investigation continued after your departure. My officers being overwhelmed with work, I engaged the services of private citizens as well, who are still asking questions and gathering information today. Among the information we acquired was the news that the *Public Journal*'s offices have been closed for several days and Harrington's whereabouts unknown. He had two employees, it seems, one of whom reported him missing. The faceless cadaver was entrusted to Dr. Osborne for an autopsy, so I had both of Harrington's employees go to the doctor's address. The condition of the face was regrettable. Dr. Osborne had prepared the body against putrefaction as best he could, but the process was already well under way. As a result, neither of Harrington's employees could identify the body with certainty, but both agreed that its proportions certainly suggested their employer. I was unable to attend the inspection myself, but upon receiving their report I summoned them here and ended the morning court session

early to question them. I was not able to extract much of value from either, but there must have been many who wanted Thomas Harrington dead."

"For what reason?"

"His muck-raking offended a great many people. His custom was to blackmail his victims, demanding money in exchange for not running an article. And then there was the matter of the Pacific Company."

"Which was…?"

"Have you ever dabbled in speculation, Professor?"

"I'm afraid the stock-market is quite outside my realm of expertise."

"Yes, you do give that impression. However, the corpse was concealed in your fireplace—not a hiding place commonly resorted to. Hence my asking you here, but I suspect that you have little to do even with investment, let alone speculation."

"To be honest, Sir John, I do have an interest in money. My research could always benefit from more funding. If someone I trusted made the right proposal to me, I might well take him up on it. For better or worse, however, I count no such persons among my acquaintance."

As he spoke, Barton could not help remembering what Edward had told him.

"According to Dr. Osborne," the magistrate continued, "Harrington was strangled."

"The culprit was a man of some strength, then," said Barton, still somewhat distracted.

"There are no signs of a struggle. But by using ether or laudanum to render him senseless and doing it in his sleep, even a weak person could have committed the murder, I would have thought."

"For ether to be forcibly administered, the victim's movements would have to be constrained," Barton said. "This would be difficult for someone of little strength. Unless he had accomplices, I suppose. Laudanum, however, is essentially diluted opium. If the circumstances did not arouse the victim's suspicion, I suppose it could be mixed into their drink without difficulty."

"Your pupils, Professor Barton, knew the structure of the fireplace. But since all five of them knew, it seems unlikely that just one would have hidden the body there and risked discovery by the others. Unless all five were in on the enterprise, that is."

“Edward and Nigel discovered the body. It follows that they were not the ones who concealed it. Accordingly, the hypothesis that the five of them conspired together will not stand, either.”

“Whoever used the fireplace as a hiding place knew its structure. They believed, however, that the secret was theirs and theirs alone. Does this suggest anyone you know, Professor?”

That Robert was apprised of the fireplace’s design and therefore a suspect was something even Al had realized. Almost certainly, the same had occurred to the magistrate. And it was more than likely that Robert underestimated what the others knew about the fireplace. He fitted the description perfectly.

Beads of sweat formed on Barton’s forehead. If Robert were tried and condemned, the school would founder. Robert’s wife hated dissection. She would close the school, sell the building, and return to the comfort of her family’s manor house. The preparations would all be seized to cover his brother’s debts.

How he hoped Robert was innocent!

Was it not possible that someone had learnt about the fireplace from Robert, and made use of the space on his own initiative?

“Putting aside the Harrington case… ,” said the magistrate. Barton was relieved at the change of subject, but this quickly evaporated when the next topic proved even more awkward. “I am struck by the extent of the falsehood in what your prized pupils Edward Turner and Nigel Hart initially said.”

“Let me offer my sincere apologies on their behalf. It was all done for my sake.”

“Were the boy’s limbs amputated for your sake too?”

“No, as they said, they did that to ensure that he could be buried on hallowed ground.”

“Indeed, that is what they said. But I can think of one other reason why they might have done it.”

The magistrate fell silent. Barton had the distinct impression of a sharp gaze from open eyes behind the black cloth.

After a moment, Sir John continued.

“If some clue to the culprit’s identity had remained on one of the limbs…”

“Was there not such a clue on the boy’s chest?”

“Ah, but if that were a ruse to conceal the truth…”

“A rather overelaborate one, surely.”

“Mr. Turner said he threw the legs into the Thames. He may have wanted us not to examine them. Some evidence implicating either him, Mr. Hart, or the pair together in the boy’s murder may have remained on the legs. He removed them, but did not have time to properly dispose of them.”

“Edward… Edward and Nigel… Mutilate a friend to conceal evidence? They would never… The idea is ridiculous.”

“Does it not seem more likely than mutilating him to disguise suicide as murder? Remember what Mr. Turner claimed: they amputated all four limbs because, if they had only severed the left arm, someone might have realized that they were doing it to disguise a suicide. Consider this story from a different angle, however. If they had only amputated one leg, someone might have realized that the leg bore some clue to the culprit’s identity. Thus, they removed all four limbs, and then cut the left wrist to suggest suicide when they showed it to me.”

“Neither of them had any reason to kill their friend.”

“We have only their word for that. Was he even their friend at all? Perhaps their connection with him took some other form, which they are now concealing from us. As I said earlier, I cannot always distinguish truth from lies when someone speaks, but Hart’s lies were quite obvious from his voice. I cannot say the same of Turner’s voice, but if Hart is lying, and Turner agrees with him, then Turner must be lying too.”

“Edward and Nigel would never… They are fine young men.”

“Even I will admit their ability. It is commendable. But we must uncover the truth. Will you assist me in this?”

“What can I do?”

“Turner seems to be shrewd, but Hart is too weak to keep a secret for long, I think. Threats, however, may not work on him. If you were to ask him sincerely for the truth, I expect he might open up to you.”

“Sir John,” said Moore. “It is time for court.”

Outside the Temple Bank’s door, Peter—spotty porter and messenger boy— reclined in his battered chair. As Barton approached, he leapt to his feet and greeted him with a professional smile, doffing his well-worn cap.

“I believe Edward is already here?” said Barton.

“Mr. Turner, sir? No, I can’t say as I’ve seen him.”

Barton reached for the door, but Peter was faster. He seized the handle and pushed the door open with a bow, which he held as he waited for a tip. Barton hurriedly handed him a few coins.

Behind the two counters inside were two elderly clerks, looking almost like twins. They pushed their spectacles up their noses and welcomed him to the bank.

“I wish to see Mr. Hume,” he said.

“His wife called for him some time ago. He has been at home since.” A finger pointed at the ceiling.

“Have my pupils been here?”

“Mr. Hart appeared not long ago, but we have not seen Mr. Turner,” said one of them.

“He may have used the outer staircase to go directly to Mr. Hume’s residence,” offered the other.

“The stairs are in the rear lane,” said the first one. “Mr. Turner often uses them.”

Barton climbed to the third floor via the asthmatically wheezing staircase inside the bank. The Humes gave him a warm welcome.

“We were expecting you,” said Mr. Hume. “Mr. Hart conveyed your message.”

“Where is he?”

“He left with Edward.”

The Humes kept the baby’s cradle in the cosy living room, and a nursemaid was crooning over the child as they spoke.

“Danny can already sit up, you know,” Mrs. Hume said. “You must see. Mary, bring Danny here. I shall hold him—you might drop the little mite.”

“You hired a nursemaid?” asked Barton.

“The gentleman wishes to meet you, Mary. Professor Daniel Barton.”

Mary curtseyed in her white apron, eyes lowered. Chestnut curls showed beneath her white mob-cap.

“You too, Danny,” said Mrs. Hume, smiling down at the infant in her arms. “Say hello to Mr. Barton.”

“Assisting at Danny’s birth seems to have made Edward quite fond of him,” said Hume. “He sometimes visits just to see how he is. And Danny adores him.”

“Mr. Hume,” said Barton. “I must confess that I am here on a rather difficult matter.”

“That business Edward was talking about, I presume. Let us move to my study.”

Barton was glad to learn that Hume had grown close enough to Edward to call him by his first name. If only Sir John, too, knew his pupil better, it would surely dispel his suspicions.

Once they were alone in the study, he said, “Your wife appears to have lost weight. Is she well?”

“Very well indeed. Lost weight? That cannot be so.”

Perhaps the low neckline of her dress had simply emphasized the slenderness of her neck. “I must have been mistaken,” said Barton, to reassure the frowning Hume. He then broached the main topic. “I shall ask quite plainly. Is it true that my brother has significant debts?”

“Edward spoke of your concern about this,” said Hume. “As an employee of the bank, I cannot reveal such things to outsiders, but…”

“He has used my preparations as security, I understand.”

“He borrowed money from undesirable quarters. We ourselves take care to avoid any connection with unstable concerns like the Pacific Company.”

Where had Barton heard that name before? Ah, yes—Sir John had mentioned it just that morning.

“Is that one of my brother’s creditors?”

“No, he was an investor… or, shall I say, a speculator.”

“Meaning?”

“Among the brokers who carry out the actual buying and selling of shares, there are some who intentionally manipulate stock prices for profit. I should say, rather, that such rogues make up the larger part of the profession. Indeed, brokers of good conscience are so rare that they might as well be imaginary. Now, it is in the nature of stock prices to rise and fall unduly in response to rumour. Even the East India Company’s stock price once plunged due to false information in the market—rumours of factories attacked by natives and so on. Those falsehoods turned out to have been spread by none other than an executive of the East India Company itself. He was working with a broker, of course. When the company’s shares fell in value, they snapped them up, secure in the knowledge that the firm’s

fundamental soundness would buoy the price back up when the stories were revealed to be untrue. The profits were tremendous."

"An enviable tale."

"Mr. Barton, you absolutely must not dabble in such matters as these. Amateurs find themselves forced to buy high and sell low. It ends in ruin. Your brother was one such victim, misled by the silver tongue of a dishonest broker. He bought a great deal of stock in the Pacific Company when its price was on the rise. Convinced that the price would rise even higher, he then bought further stock on margin."

"'On margin'?"

"He borrowed from his broker to fund the purchase. The customary agreement involves repaying the loan in six months. If the stock price has risen by then, the borrower reaps the difference as profit—but what if it has fallen? The money that was borrowed must still be repaid in full."

Knowing that Barton was entirely ignorant of the stock-market, Hume was careful to explain the matter fully.

"Stocks whose price is on the rise are in demand from all quarters, which in turn helps them continue to rise. The Pacific Company was a 'bubble' company, as they are known—neither responsibly managed nor profitable. Nevertheless, its stock price continued to go up, solely because it was in fashion. Finally—and quite recently—it came crashing down. Reports had begun to appear in the newspapers about people with government connections deciding to take their profit by selling all their shares. Learning this, other stockholders quickly followed suit. Once a stock begins to fall, it does so as rapidly as a rock tumbling down a cliff. This is where amateurs tend to err. They cannot bring themselves to sell at a loss until the crushing blow that forces them to act. They hesitate, wondering if it might rise again, and their losses grow larger and larger until the time for final settlement of accounts arrives. This is the situation your brother finds himself in today."

Barton could only sigh.

"Sixty years ago," said Hume, "before you or I were even born, a similar 'bubble' occurred. It pertained to the South Sea Company, which claimed to have plans for trading, colonisation, gold and silver mining, and development around South America. The idea for the company was said to have come from Daniel Defoe, who, as you may recall, was the author of

Robinson Crusoe. Government officials and cabinet ministers became involved in the speculation, and the stock rose to extraordinary heights. But the South Sea Company lacked a royal charter, which meant that when rumours arose of a lawsuit against the firm, its share price dropped calamitously. Some ministers and parliamentarians took their own lives or were imprisoned, and the general upheaval was considerable. But men are slaves to greed—we never learn. And so…"

Hume paused for a moment.

"When your brother brought his woes to me, my impression was that it was already too late. The money his broker had lent him simply had to be repaid. Remember that I have known Dr. Barton for many years. I wanted to help if I could. But a banker is not an adventurer. A loan can only be approved if its profitability is more or less assured. I had to refuse his request, much as it distressed me to do so.

"The broker to whom Dr. Barton is indebted is called Guy Evans, a man of some notoriety in financial circles. He has worked with an unsavoury newspaper by the name of the *Public Journal* to manipulate information."

"Thomas Paddington… ."

"Harrington. He is known to you?"

"Only by name. Mentioned once or twice."

"To settle his stock account, Dr. Barton borrowed an enormous sum from Evans."

"With my preparations as security."

Hume hunched over, as if personally to blame.

"Those preparations are mine," Barton said. "My brother had no right to dispose of them."

"If you wish to insist on your right of ownership, it appears that you will need to do so in court. However…"

"Will it be difficult to prevail?"

"The proceedings will drag on endlessly. That slave trial started six months ago and still has not finished—although, if I recall correctly, today is the final day."

They were both silent for a time. Then Hume spoke again.

"I must ask you not to speak of this to anyone else, but among those who made vast profits by purchasing Pacific shares when they were cheap and selling just before they reached their peak, many were connected to the

government. The Lord Mayor of London made no small profit himself. They knew something the rest of us did not."

Chapter 8

Edward, Nigel,

Help me.

Hearing footsteps, Nathan turned over the paper and covered it with a blank leaf.

Evans burst into the room.

It was evening, and Nathan's dinner tray had already been removed. He had not expected Evans to return tonight, and his guard was down. With no appetite, he had barely touched his food.

Evans was carrying a candlestick with a lit candle. He walked about lighting the candles in the room one after another.

Nathan noted the strap in his captor's hand. Every act of defiance earned him a whipping, and not a gentle one. He had tried to be obedient of late—had his failure to eat aggravated Evans anyway? His stomach was so constricted by anxiety that he could not have eaten even if he had wished to.

Evans pointedly brought the candle near the blank sheet of paper. "Perhaps my eyes are failing," he said. "I cannot see a single word."

"You understand nothing about the creative process, Mr. Evans. A single line can take days to complete."

"A chicken that lays no eggs, like a goat that gives no milk, is useless," he said coldly. He raised the strap. "Clearly this has no sting for you. Perhaps I should use a blade."

Nathan had concluded that his life was safe until he finished the *Elegy*, but that Evans could not publish the work of "Thomas Howard" while Nathan was alive to reveal its false provenance. And Evans was growing tired of waiting.

"I shall write," said Nathan. "I shall write the poem. Let me live."

Evans's smile did not extend beyond the corners of his mouth. "I am not known for much patience," he said. "As for your talent, it seems it may have dried up." Then he left the room.

Nathan looked around him.

The bed was too heavy. Moving the wardrobe would be quite beyond him. The writing desk he did not wish to move from its place by the window. That left the small bookcase filled with part of Evans's library. Nathan removed the books to lighten it—although not, unfortunately, very

much—and then pushed it in front of the door before replacing the books again. Leaving Shakespeare, Pope, and Milton to guard the door for him, Nathan returned to his desk and continued writing his letter.

I am imprisoned against my will. I have no way to communicate with you.

My gaoler is a man called Guy Evans. He lives in London, but I do not know the address.

On the day of the riot, I was caught up in the disturbance and arrested. Despite my innocence, I was imprisoned in Newgate. That such a hellish place should exist! I was put in leg irons like the worst of miscreants. Could there be any greater insult? The fetters marked my flesh, as if to brand me a criminal. These scars will be with me until I die. I could not move without feeling the heavy iron scrape at my flesh, bite into my bones. The message they sent me was clear: You are a worthless being whose life is of no account. I can never describe to you the evils I suffered in there… .

Over the course of Nathan's confinement, and particularly since the whippings had begun, a growing sense of powerlessness had overtaken him, silencing the urge to violence that the razor had aroused in him.

The razor. It had never been returned. He was unarmed.

He had no way to flee. Write all the letters he might, they could not be delivered. He tore up the one he had just written and opened the window. The night flowed in, sullen and hot. And God maintained His silence.

The outer wall dropped straight down to a lane like a valley river. If he ripped up the curtains and bed-clothes to make a rope… But he doubted he could climb down to the lane below.

At that moment, it occurred to him that he had not heard the jingle of keys after Evans had closed the door earlier.

Had he simply not been paying attention?

No. Every time he heard those keys, it was like being kicked in the stomach. Not a sound he could have failed to notice.

He cleared the bookcase again and moved it slightly to one side. Placing his hand on the doorknob, he turned and pulled it towards him. The door opened a fraction.

Evans had forgotten to lock it.

This was his chance!

If he was to escape, it must be now—though it might be fatal to be caught in the act.

Nathan closed the door again and hurriedly made ready. He decided to leave the unfinished *Elegy* behind. If he took it with him, Evans would be relentless in pursuit of him. Nathan knew the poem by heart in any case. What mattered now was to make good his escape.

What should he take with him? Next to nothing.

The corridor was dark, the candles in the sconces unlit. Nathan pressed himself against the wall and walked on tiptoe. Peering down the staircase, he saw that the hall adjoining the entrance was in darkness too. He crept down the stairs without making a sound.

The front door creaked faintly as it opened. He stepped out onto the porch and descended the stone staircase to the street. Carefully avoiding the light from the street lamps, he slipped through the darkness at a run. No doubt due to his poor diet of late, he was out of breath and his legs quivered. But still he ran. The darkness drew tight around his body. He knew roughly where he was going: when Evans had taken him to Matthew's, he had willed himself to remember the route. Edward and Nigel's anatomy school lay between the coffee-house and the *Public Journal* offices. Having been in prison, it no longer bothered him to have nothing but the clothes on his back, or to be begging for help. He had lost all concern for appearances.

If he could travel through the London streets at night without being robbed, it would be a miracle. Still, Nathan had no reason to fear robbers or footpads. There was nothing they could take from him. No money, certainly. *If you've no money, then hand over your clothes!* With pleasure! Fortunately, it was summer. It wouldn't matter if he were naked.

He ran and ran. Something brushed against his shin. A shape loomed in the weak light of a street lamp as if squeezed from the darkness. It was a dog, trotting alongside him. It did not seem to have attached itself to him, however. Perhaps they were simply headed in the same direction.

The visit to Matthew's had been during the day. With the sun down, the face of the town changed. He forced himself to remember, comparing the dilapidated scene before him to the one in his memory, confirming that they were the same.

He felt as if his body were fragmenting, but he did not stop. Blood

seemed to flow from the windows of the houses on both sides of him, but he swam through it, his gasps becoming the beating of birds' wings, enclosing him, bearing him up.

Astonishingly, he ran through London at the dead of night all the way to Matthew's without encountering anyone threatening. The coffee-house had closed hours ago, and in the darkness the square merged with the sky. The fountain bubbled as strongly as during the daytime, and he saw a glint of silver in the running water like an abandoned blade.

His escape seemed to Nathan the greatest miracle of all. God had turned His gaze on one small creature on the face of His earth.

The rest of the way he knew without hesitation.

Chapter 9

The Professor returned home to find three of his pupils waiting for him. Charlie wagged his tail without getting up.

"I am extremely and unusually weary," said Barton, flopping into a chair. "Let us talk another day."

He felt as though he sat with his back to the edge of a cliff.

His brother was ensnared in debts he had no way of repaying, which put the collection that Barton had spent his life assembling in danger of being carted away. As long as it remained on display in Robert's home, there was no risk of its being lost, whether his brother claimed ownership or not, but if it fell into other hands, it might be sold to anyone, anywhere. There was certainly a demand for such items.

"Professor," said Al. "As I believe Edward told you, we are not the only ones who know of the fireplace's structure."

"So I gather."

"I have revealed the name of the other person to Clarence and Ben."

"My brother?"

"Yes."

"We agree with Al's theory too," said Clarence. "It must be him. He would have assumed that we were not aware of how the fireplace worked, making it the perfect hiding place."

Ben nodded.

"The smell of decay would be disguised by the school's other cadavers," Al said. "Once we began laying fires in the hearth again, the naked body would be smoked like a side of bacon. It was disfigured just in case, but thought to be safe from discovery. Indeed, we ourselves might not have noticed how the fireplace was built were it not for our work installing the winch. I am not fond of Dr. Barton, but it is hard to think of him as the author of such a brutal act. And yet…"

"Whose body *was* it, I wonder?"

"Are Edward and Nigel upstairs?" asked Barton.

"They have not come back yet. But Nigel was with you, surely, sir. Did you not see Edward at the bank?"

"There were complications."

"After you left, the magistrate's assistant and the Trapper called," said

Clarence.

"'The Trapper'…? Ah, you mean—?" He bared his teeth, and ground them for good measure.

"Exactly. They said that Sir John wished to see you."

"That wish has been fulfilled."

"You went to the magistrate's office?"

"I did."

"Professor, can we not share what we know?" said Al. Although the oldest, he did not assert himself often, partly because the Chatterbox was so indefatigable. Still, there was urgency in his words now. "What troubles you troubles us as well—all of us. We all understand that the school could not go on without your brother's financial support. Losing him would bring all dissection, experimentation, and research to an end. If you tell us to seal our lips regarding Dr. Barton, we shall do so. We can be trusted to act in your interests, come what may. And so we beg you—allow us to co-operate in giving you assistance. That is all we want."

"Hear, hear," said the other two loyally.

"I am grateful that you feel that way, truly," said Barton. "However, I do not have my own thoughts in order yet." He paused for a moment. "The faceless man is all but identified. A man named Paddington—no, Harrington. He publishes a newspaper called the *Public Journal*."

"That tattle sheet?" said Ben.

"Sir John called it a vile publication. Do you make a habit of reading that sort of thing?"

"The tattle is diverting."

"The publisher was sentenced to the stocks," said Clarence. "I went to look."

"So did I," admitted Ben.

"When was that—a few months ago? Do you remember the public protest demanding that Wilkes be returned to Parliament?"

"Only indirectly."

"A gin factory was burnt down, too."

"And the *Public Journal*'s publisher was gaoled for his inflammatory articles."

"He deserved far worse," frowned Al. "The man was a market manipulator. Helped drive up stock prices and then cause a collapse."

“You mean the Pacific Company?” said Barton. “Sir John mentioned it, and the bank manager explained it all to me. You are well informed, Al.”

“My father is a trader, so he is quite alert to matters of this sort. He has some money in the market himself. Fortunately, he is as strict as a bank, and only invests in reliable companies. The Pacific affair, however, remains notorious. No small number of people have been bankrupted by it. —Oh! Was Dr. Barton an investor, too?”

“How did you know?”

“Anyone might guess as much from this conversation. If Dr. Barton was ruined by the Pacific business, he would certainly have wanted to dispatch that journalist.”

Barton groaned. “He was trapped by a broker,” he said, although he had not intended to bother his pupils with it at first.

“A broker? Which one?” pressed Al. “Surely not Evans?”

“You know him?”

“My father told me about him. He said that Evans was behind the entire ‘bubble’—in league with Harrington. Dissembling is a useful skill for any broker, but it seems that Evans is a master of the art. He also ensures that the powerful see a profit, which means that he enjoys protection even from government officials.”

“Hume said that, too,” nodded Barton. “I shall retire upstairs to rest. If Edward and Nigel return, send them to my quarters.” And with that, he trudged upstairs.

The others watched from the foot of the staircase. Charlie looked up and wagged his tail, still without getting up.

“It occurred to us soon enough, so Sir John is bound to be watching Dr. Barton closely too.”

“Which means the school might have to close.”

“As if we would allow that!”

“Why *kill* Harrington, I wonder?”

“If it was murder, there’s no hope.”

“And what about the other one?”

“The boy?”

“Yes.”

“When Edward and Nigel come back, shall we hound them until they talk?” asked Clarence.

“No,” Al said firmly. “There is surely more to their situation than we know, but if we press them too insistently Nigel might break down.” He paused. “Let our friend and colleague Edward confide in us.”

Chapter 10

From Matthew's coffee-house, Nathan made his way to Barton's school of anatomy.

The dog followed the same route.

They arrived at a building with a stone staircase, which the dog bounded up at once. This was Nathan's destination. At the head of the stairs was a set of imposing double doors. Viewed from the street, the whole appeared to be a single building, but Edward had explained that the doors actually opened onto a courtyard, with the anatomy school and Barton's residence on the right, and his brother Robert's house on the left.

Part of one door had been converted into a small wicket-gate, which opened inwards when the dog nudged it with its head. Nathan followed the dog's lead and crawled inside.

The windows of the inner buildings were all dark, leaving him only starlight to see by. He could not make out much of the courtyard, but he saw a gravel path leading past some ornamental pots to the building on the right.

Nathan was less concerned about someone hearing his footsteps than he had been at the start of his escape. Still, he held his breath as he followed the path. He had slipped through the double doors without permission. If he were seen and questioned, would they believe that he had come to see Edward and Nigel? It was the middle of the night. What if they refused to let him meet his friends and simply handed him over to the Bow Street Runners? If he told them about Evans, would they understand? If they were to contact Evans… Assuming that Evans could have men released from prison, he could also put them behind bars again. Nathan could never return to Newgate. If Evans sent him back there, no one would get him out this time.

The building where Edward and Nigel slept loomed black. Nathan grasped the handle of what he took to be the students' entrance. He expected it to be locked, but the door swung inwards with a quiet creak.

It was even darker inside the building, where not even starlight reached. Nathan advanced nervously, keeping one hand on the wall.

Chapter 11

Let our friend and colleague Edward confide in us.

Ben and Clarence had agreed to this, but when their friend and colleague was half-carried back into the house by Abbott, inevitably they had some questions. Edward kept one hand pressed to his side, blood oozing between his fingers. Nigel, accompanying him, had lost all colour from his lips.

After lowering himself into a chair with Abbott's help, the first thing Edward said was, "Where is the Professor?"

Clarence pointed upstairs. "Exhausted," he said.

"Please speak quietly. I do not want him to know that I am back, lest my condition add to his concerns."

"And what of our concerns?" Clarence said. "We are suffocating under their weight. Nor does your refusal to talk help matters. What on earth happened to you?"

They helped Edward remove his shirt. Blood dripped from the laceration in his side. "Nothing serious," he said, before giving a strangled cry: Al had poked a finger doused with alcohol into the wound.

"Not too worrying," Al agreed, removing his finger and checking how far up it had been bloodied. "About half an inch at its deepest point. No organs were reached. Not near any arteries. We simply need to staunch the bleeding, disinfect the wound, and sew it up."

Ben brought Edward a glass of wine with laudanum from the kitchen. Peering over his shoulder into the room, Nelly stiffened at the sight confronting her. As her mouth began to open, Al and Clarence quickly clamped their hands over it before she could wail.

"Quiet, please, Nelly," said Edward. "Professor Barton will hear."

Nelly nodded vigorously. When the other two removed their hands, she covered her mouth again with her own. Edward waved her back into the kitchen.

"Mr. Turner, Mr. Hart," said Abbott. "I shall ask you once more. Do you honestly have no idea who might have attacked you?"

"None, sir."

"None."

"Were I Sir John, I could judge the truth of that," he muttered.

Edward groaned again as Ben pierced his skin with a needle. Ben was the son of a tailor; Clarence's father, incidentally, was a barber.

"Your assailant was a young man," said Abbott. "To judge from his dress, a low-bred person."

"He must have been after our purses," said Nigel. "Even in the middle of the day it can happen, as long as no one is around to see."

"Yes, but if I had not come running, he might have finished you off, you know."

"Does Sir John suspect us of something?" Nigel asked.

Abbott seemed startled. "Not in the slightest."

"Was that not why you were able to come to our assistance when we were attacked just now—because you had been following us?"

"I had orders from Sir John to ask at an establishment called Matthew's about the boy Nathan Cullen. I went alone, as Miss Moore was accompanying the magistrate in court, and happened to see you emerging from the coffee-house. I, er…" He faltered for a moment. "I had also been told to keep an eye out for you."

"So you *were* watching them," said Clarence. "But why them?"

Abbott ignored the question. "From where I was standing, a passer-by appeared to stumble into Mr. Turner," he said. "When Mr. Turner collapsed, I realized the matter was more serious and ran to him. His assailant, to my regret, made good his escape."

"You have our thanks for seeing us home," said Nigel. "We shall treat Edward's wound and put him to bed, so there is no reason to stay longer."

"My report to Sir John will reach him after the afternoon session in court. I can assure you that the man who did this shall be found and arrested."

So saying, Abbott turned and left.

"Does this hurt?" Ben ran the needle through once more.

"Of course it does. Be gentle, will you."

"I cannot do it any more gently than this. The thread must be drawn tight or the wound will not close… . Charlie, there is no point in hoping. This is not a dissection."

"The laudanum was perhaps too weak. Do you want more wine?"

"No, I might become addicted."

Al leaned in and examined the wound with a magnifying glass.

“Nigel, record that… no, you must be too upset—Clarence, keep a record, if you please. The skin has opened outwards. The depth of the wound we ascertained to be half an inch. As for length…”

“This might be an autopsy.”

“‘Leave the autopsies to us.’ Was it not you who told the magistrate that, Clarence? This will be good practice.”

“Am I a practice cadaver, then?” asked Edward, getting almost to the end of the sentence before groaning again.

“Seven stitches to go,” said Ben, his fingers bloody.

Obeying an unspoken request in a look from Edward, Nigel pushed a small cloth-wrapped rod into his mouth to bite on. He then knelt down beside him.

“Whoever did this was no professional,” said Ben as he worked the needle. “If it was money he wanted, he would have used the blade to threaten. If murder was his intent, he would have stumbled into Edward’s chest and struck there. But the wound is shallow—although I will allow that half an inch is no mere scratch. A very curious injury.”

“It would scarcely have breached the fat on you, Ben.”

“Be quiet and focus on the task at hand, please,” said Nigel. “We do not need another Clarence.”

“So, let me speak,” demanded Clarence.

“What would you say?” Ben asked.

He thought for a moment. “Nothing in particular,” he admitted.

Once the stitches were complete, Ben cut the thread. Now well gnawed, the stick was removed from Edward’s mouth, and a bandage was wound about him from side to shoulder. All five of them, both Edward and those attending to him, were perspiring.

“Will you rest upstairs?” asked Al.

“The stairs would be too painful. Here will do.”

“Edward,” Al said, his voice growing serious. “Talk to us.”

“It hurts to speak.”

“*I* will talk,” said Nigel uncharacteristically. “Edward, let me tell them. You cannot take all this on yourself.”

“It is not their problem.”

“That applies to Nathan. But the matter regarding Dr. Barton affects us all.”

The other three were in vigorous agreement.

"Tell us, by God! There should be no secrets between us," said Clarence. "A new rule, but one that will be adopted unanimously, I think."

"No objection here," said Ben, raising his hand.

"Peremptory, perhaps, but it gets my vote," said Al.

Edward nodded weakly. They looked at Nigel.

"We know our adversary," he told them. "Edward and I were attacked by some ne'er-do-well unknown to us, but we are certain as to who engaged his services."

"Who was it?"

"A man called Guy Evans."

The name was clearly familiar to them.

"You know him?"

"We know that he worked with Harrington, the publisher of the *Public Journal*, to play the market," said Al. "The Professor's brother fell prey to their scheme and is now heavily in debt."

"Yes. Edward heard this from Mr. Hume at the Temple Bank. It was Edward who told Professor Barton."

"And it seems that the faceless fellow from the fireplace was Harrington… . Why does that not surprise you?"

"It was always a possibility," said Nigel. "It was Harrington's lies that ruined Robert Barton, and forced him to put the Professor's preparations up as security."

The comment caused consternation.

"What did you say!? The preparations?"

"When the time came for Dr. Barton to settle his account, he borrowed the money from Evans, offering the specimens as warranty."

"That would explain the Professor's mood."

"But surely if his brother were to resort to murder, his first target would be Evans," objected Al. "He could simply kill him and burn the IOU. Why Harrington?"

"At Evans's insistence, we believe. Evans had reason to want him out of the way."

"What reason?"

"It is a long story."

"Take all day and the next if you must, man, but tell it," Clarence said.

“You seem to know all about this, Nigel, so let me ask one question first,” said Al. “Even if Evans wanted to make a murderer of Robert, why should Robert agree to it? If he were caught, it would end his life.” They were not bothered calling the elder Barton brother by his given name now.

“Blackmail, and bait.”

“The bait I understand—exemption from debt. But blackmail? Was Evans privy to some other dark secret of Robert’s, apart from his debts?”

“The pregnant woman.”

“Miss Roughhead?”

Nigel explained their theory that Robert had violated and eventually murdered Elaine. “And if Evans knew of this… ,” he added.

“… He would have Robert caught firmly by the tail,” Al acknowledged.

There was a long silence before Clarence said what they were all thinking: “A death sentence for Robert would mean the death of this school as well.”

“Evans and Harrington were working together, weren’t they?” said Al. “Why should Evans…?”

“For the same reason Edward and I were attacked. It has to do with the dead boy.”

Nigel paused and looked around before continuing.

“As you may remember, his name was Nathan Cullen. He came to London from a country village. He was marvellously talented. At only seventeen, he was quite fluent in the English of many centuries past. He also wrote poetry in the modern idiom. Having discovered a rare work written by a mediaeval poet, he took it to a bookshop along with some verse he had composed himself. The owner temporized, but it caught the attention of someone else.”

The others leaned forward.

“Guy Evans.”

“So he dabbles in this sort of business, too, as well as shares?”

“Evans had no choice but to kill Harrington, under the circumstances.”

“What circumstances?” asked Clarence.

Nigel turned to Edward, as if unsure how much to impart. The latter, perhaps at last feeling the effects of the laudanum, had closed his eyes and was beginning to nod.

“Must you have Edward’s approval for every single word you say?”

asked Clarence.

"The circumstances are complicated," Nigel said at last. "Nathan was lying dead in that dissection room, his wrist slit. He had just escaped confinement in Evans's house, but at the time I was unaware of that. I thought he had killed himself… . And so I amputated his arm."

The others gasped. Nigel explained everything—the prohibition of suicides from church graveyards, the need to remove not just the telltale limb but the rest of them.

"You cut off all his arms and legs? That's idiotic!"

"But there was a sign inked on his chest that pointed to me," Nigel said, and described the heraldic imagery. "We misunderstood, thinking he was accusing me. We meant only to stow him in the fireplace until we could take him to a graveyard, but in all the confusion that day he was discovered."

Nigel summarized the rest of the story for them: Edward's visit to the magistrate's office with Barton, Sir John's request that he produce the limbs, how Edward had thrown both legs into the Thames on his way back to Bow Street with the arms (which were embalmed) because the legs had borne the scars of Nathan's imprisonment—about which Nigel also told them. Finally, he explained how he himself, unable to wait patiently, had gone to the magistrate's office as well.

"Sir John's assistant noticed the ink on Nathan's fingers. The staining on precisely three fingers revealed the intended meaning of the mark—whom it signified. And…" Nigel paused again, uncertain. At the others' urging, he said that the sign in ink seemed to suggest that Nathan's murderer was Robert Barton.

"Robert may have put him to sleep with ether or some such drug, then cut his wrist to simulate a suicide. It was Edward and I, as I mentioned earlier, who amputated Nathan's limbs. Edward found me at the task and lent me support. But we were wrong. It was murder. Our intervention must have come as a surprise to the culprit. He had only opened one artery, but the body was found with all four limbs missing. He expected the matter to be treated as a suicide and quietly forgotten, but instead the magistrate has taken a close interest in it. What is more, Harrington's body, too, was retrieved from the fireplace where Robert allegedly abandoned it, assuming it would not be discovered."

“But why should he do all this?” asked Al. “Leaving Harrington aside for a moment. Robert had no connection whatsoever with the boy, surely?”

Nigel glanced at Edward again.

“Tell them,” Edward murmured drowsily.

“Have you been listening?” asked Clarence.

“I have,” he said with a nod, but then appeared to doze off again.

Nigel gathered his thoughts before speaking.

“Nathan had a letter addressed to us in his pocket. We discovered it after we operated on him and smeared the ink. Reading the letter made everything clear. Nathan had not found that ancient poem—he had forged it. His intentions were not wicked. He merely wanted the bookshop owner to recognize his ability. But instead, it came to the attention of Guy Evans.”

“The broker who ensnared Robert.”

“The very same. If the poem had been authentic, it would have been of great value. When he left it with the bookshop, Nathan held on to one leaf of parchment, to prevent the whole being published without his permission. But it was this page that allowed Evans to detect the fabrication.” Nigel explained the dating inconsistency. “At the same time, Nathan was writing another poem in similarly antique English. *Elegy*, it was called. Evans tricked him into coming to his home, then imprisoned him there and demanded that he finish his *Elegy*. When he refused, Evans threatened to prosecute him for the forgery. The prospect terrified Nathan, whose experience of being sent to prison as an innocent man had left him with a horror of the place. Evans intended to have him copy the finished *Elegy* onto parchment in a mediaeval hand, then announce it along with the earlier forgery as new discoveries, earning a vast sum in the process. No matter how Evans pressed him, however, inspiration did not come to him. Before long he was being maltreated—denied meals, then beaten. Finally Evans intimated that Nathan was becoming worthless, ‘like a chicken that does not lay or a goat that gives no milk.’ Nathan was petrified. He was living proof of the deception, meaning that his very existence was an impediment to Evans’s plans to sell the work. Fearing for his life, he finally escaped. He came straight here, having no one to turn to but Edward and me. But Robert must have been lying in wait. And… and I thought Nathan had committed __”

“But, again, what reason did Robert have to kill him?”

“Evans forced him to do it, I think. Just as he did in the case of Harrington.”

“I wonder why Nathan was left on a table instead of in the fireplace,” said Ben. “That would surely have been easier.”

“Two of them there would make the smell too strong, I imagine,” said Clarence. “Even for this room.”

“I believe,” said Nigel, “that he wanted Edward and me to find Nathan, apparently having died by his own hand, so that we would not go in search of him.”

“Still, there is no actual proof that Robert did it, is there?”

“Nathan’s letter makes it clear that Evans aimed to eliminate him.”

“Perhaps Evans followed Nathan here and killed him himself?”

“The deed itself was done by Robert, I believe. The artery was opened quite neatly. The sign inked on his chest also indicated Robert.”

“How could he have been waiting for him? How could he have known that Nathan would take refuge here?”

“That puzzled Edward and me, too, but Edward thought of the solution: Bess. Do you remember that she had been missing for some days previously?”

“I saw her today.”

“Edward reasoned that Evans might have taken the dog from Robert in advance. Then, after giving Nathan an opportunity to escape—pretending to forget to lock his door, perhaps—he also let Bess go. She would head straight for our house, and Evans knew that Nathan, too, had nowhere else to go. Bess’s arrival alerted Robert to Nathan’s approach.”

“One moment,” interrupted Al. “There was something that does not work in your account. What was it, now…? Well, it will come to me later, perhaps. Go on.”

“Everyone who knew about Nathan’s familiarity with ancient poetry was an obstacle to Evans. Harrington had read part of Nathan’s *Elegy*, so Evans had Robert eliminate him. His body was at the bottom of the flue, with putrefaction more advanced than Nathan’s, so he must have died first… . May I have some claret? Talking has made me thirsty.”

“Yes, this has been a month’s worth of talking, for you.”

“No laudanum in this one,” said Ben, handing him a cup.

Nigel drained it and continued. “Nathan also wrote in his letter about his

concern for Edward and me. He thought that Evans would come for us next. As, indeed, he did."

"Why should Evans care about you two?" asked Clarence.

"We also knew about Nathan's gift for old English. Like Harrington, we had seen the *Elegy*. This made us, as much as Harrington, obstacles to Evans's publishing the forgery as if it were genuine—especially if he intended to bring out the *Elegy* in its unfinished state. I think that today was a warning to us not to speak out."

"So he might come after you again?"

"You may be in real danger."

"Will he use Robert again?"

"Even Robert surely has his limits."

"Well, the bait might have become irrelevant, but the blackmail will be in force until either Evans dies, or you do."

"Miss Roughhead's death was also convenient for Evans," said Nigel. "Nathan had revealed his knowledge of mediaeval English to her as well. She was another Evans would have wished to erase. Perhaps Robert's disposal of her was at Evans's direction—and then used to intimidate him."

"What a vile character."

"Surely the attentions of the Bow Street Runners will persuade Evans to exercise some prudence."

"But will he abandon his scheme so easily?"

"That's it!" cried Al suddenly. "The letter! That was what bothered me earlier. The magistrate's assistant confiscated Nathan's jacket when he was discovered. You must have read the letter before then—and so you should already have known that the ink did not implicate you, Nigel. In which case, why…?"

"This is becoming a very interrogation." The voice was Edward's, although he still appeared to be asleep. "How can Nigel say his piece when you pepper him with questions? When we found the letter in Nathan's pocket, we never suspected it was for us. There was much we had to do, so we hid it in our room for safe-keeping. With all the commotion, we did not have a chance to read it until last night."

"Have you shown the letter to Sir John?"

"Not yet."

"It is crucial evidence. You must submit it to the magistrate's office and

bring suit."

"Two factors prevent that," said Edward. He was visibly struggling to collect his wits as the medicine began to wear off.

"Let me tell them," said Nigel. "The first factor is that the school of anatomy, our dissections—all of it must come to an end without Robert's money."

"Which is indeed a serious problem."

"For which reason we could not tell Abbott of our suspicion that the man who stabbed Edward was an accomplice of Evans. If we bring suit against Evans, Robert will surely be charged with murder also. If he were condemned, Professor Barton would lose everything he had."

"And everything *we* had," said Ben, shaking his head.

"The other factor," said Edward, his voice now clear, "is the utter uselessness of the courts."

"May I tell them about your father?" asked Nigel.

Edward nodded and closed his eyes again.

"He was a vicar's servant. Then some of the church's silverware was stolen. Edward's father came under suspicion and was thrown into prison. At trial he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. The real thief was discovered later, but he had influential friends, and the revelation of the actual guilty party would make the earlier miscarriage of justice indefensible, so it was all kept quiet."

"Skin a judge and find a hangman," muttered Edward.

"There is all too much trading in court," Clarence added.

Even as the countries of continental Europe moved towards salaried, professional bureaucracies, England's system of unpaid service had remained unchanged since the Tudor period two centuries before. Official positions ranging from members of Parliament to magistrates were filled by volunteers from the nobility and gentry. The work itself was socially respected, but there was no shortage of unethical magistrates who saw bribes as a rightful perquisite of the position.

"Sir John does not strike me as of that kind, however."

"That remains to be seen," shrugged Edward.

"Nathan wrote in his letter about meeting others in prison as innocent as himself," said Nigel. "One boy was sentenced to transportation for picking up a shilling in the street. Grotesque, he called it."

“By enriching the Lord Mayor and the nobility, Evans has made allies,” Al said glumly. “Even if we took him to court, the jury…”

“‘The law is like a spider’s web,’” quoted Clarence. “‘Little flies are caught while big ones break through.’ Evans seems not to have laid a finger on Harrington or Nathan in person. He had another do it all. As a result, a skilled lawyer could shift all the blame onto the latter person and have Evans found not guilty. And if he also reached out to the jury in private…”

“That reminds me,” said Al. “The verdict in the slave case was handed down yesterday. Did you hear?”

“No, I had no time to read the papers. The trial has ended, then?”

“My father heard about it last night from an acquaintance in the gallery. He was quite excited. It seems that the lawyer for the mutineer used an ingenious ploy. The merchant had bought off the whole jury, guaranteeing victory, but yesterday, when the court convened, the slave’s lawyer requested that they be swapped en bloc with a jury at another trial in a different chamber. The judge permitted the motion. The merchant had no opportunity to secure the loyalty of this new jury, and so, untainted by bribes, they listened carefully to the arguments and found the slave not guilty.”

“Bravo!”

“We must tell Sir John about everything,” said Ben. “I am sure we can trust him.”

“Murder cases are not tried by magistrates,” said Edward. “They go to the Central Court, where the jurors, as I understand it, do not take their responsibilities seriously.” He groaned. “The laudanum has worn off. Another glass, Al, if you please.”

“Did you not say you might become addicted?”

“The relief as the pain fades is delicious. I never knew such pleasure before. It is far more tempting than any wench. One could become in thrall to it.”

“Just a drop,” said Al, handing him more of the pain-killer.

“Al, did you say earlier that Evans enjoys protection from people connected with the government?” asked Ben.

He nodded firmly. “Yes, because he makes money for them. But… if we allow things to stand as they are, he will continue to pursue Nigel and Edward.”

A sombre mood settled on them.

Edward's head drooped.

Morning came.

"Where is Edward?"

Barton had arrived at the breakfast table to find Nigel there alone.

"He has a fever." Nigel's eyes were dark-ringed and puffy, as if from lack of sleep.

"What gave you that bruise on your forehead?"

"Simple clumsiness. Nothing serious."

"I think I should look in on him," said Barton, rising from his chair.

Nigel stopped him. "He is asleep."

"Better not to wake him, I suppose. Has he had an antipyretic?"

"Yes, I gave him one."

Arriving just as they finished their meal, Clarence was the first of the others to appear. "How is Edward?" he asked.

Nigel raised a finger to his lips, then pointed at Barton with his thumb.

"Good morning, Professor," said Clarence.

"Edward is in bed with a fever, it seems," said Barton.

"Oh, has it festered?"

"Festered?"

"That is an impressive bruise, Nigel. What happened?"

"Nothing serious," he said again.

Ben arrived next, then Al, each asking in turn about Edward and how Nigel had come by his bruise.

"You two also knew ? Has Edward been poorly since last night? What is festering? A boil?"

"Edward was attacked," said Clarence, despite Nigel shaking his head. The Professor was dumbfounded.

"We had better explain things to you."

Clarence recounted the events that had occurred after Barton's departure the previous evening. "As you can see," he concluded, "we know who the foe is, but cannot accuse him publicly."

"Did you get that bruise in the attack, too, Nigel?"

"No. I was just a little clumsy last night."

"Were you fighting with Edward?"

"Of course he wasn't. Do you think Edward could have hit anyone in

that state?"

"He would never hit Nigel anyway, unless he had lost his senses."

"What sort of shape is Edward in?" Barton asked Nigel.

"The pain returned when the drug wore off during the night, so I prepared another draught of laudanum and wine for him. Which is why he has not woken yet."

Al mentioned that he had examined the wound. "Do you still have the record you kept, Clarence?"

Barton scanned the paper handed to him. "If this is all accurate, the wound itself is not serious," he said. "However, if it has festered, that complicates matters a little. You did not sterilize it properly, I think."

He received an apology.

Barton looked over the record again and thought for a time. Then he rose to his feet. "I shall examine the wound myself. Somebody bring some hot water."

Three of them followed their bandy-legged teacher up the stairs. Ben went to the kitchen to get hot water.

When the bandage was removed, Edward opened his eyes just a crack. He smiled, apparently still half-asleep. "What words cannot heal, medicine will," he murmured. "What medicine cannot heal, the lance will. And what the lance cannot heal, death will."

"As Hippocrates said," Clarence was quick to observe, but the patient had already shut his eyes again.

Ben and Nelly came in, the latter carrying a bucket of hot water and a tendency to weep. Nigel firmly guided her back out of the room.

Barton squeezed the pus out of Edward's wound with stubby fingers. Edward grimaced slightly but still seemed asleep.

"Do you suppose he is dreaming about being bitten by a dog?" asked Clarence.

"By Charlie or by Bess?" said Ben mindlessly.

"An allegory for the violence of men against the ferocity of women?"

"Folly incarnate."

"Man's greatest folly is pouring a lifetime of love into a woman's backside."

"Who said that?"

"Me, just now."

While his pupils bantered, Barton wiped the inflamed wound with a piece of cloth soaked in alcohol, then applied a new bandage. “What the lance cannot heal,” he said, “time will.”

Returning to the ground floor, they found that Sir John had arrived, flanked by his assistant and his assistant’s assistant.

“The other judge is sitting in court today, leaving me free to concentrate on this case. I could hardly summon an injured man to my office, so here I am instead. How is Mr. Turner? Is he able to answer questions?”

“He is asleep due to an anaesthetic, so please address your questions to me,” said Nigel. “I must warn you, however, that I have little to say about yesterday’s events that Mr. Abbott did not see for himself.”

“As to the assailant…”

“I have no idea.”

“Mr. Hart—may I call you Nigel? I want you to tell me the truth.”

“I am doing so.”

“I wonder.”

Nigel’s lips thinned. If Abbott was an iron trap, Nigel was a rattan snare at best.

“Allow me to explain,” said the Professor.

His two best pupils must not be attacked again. Even if it meant the end of the anatomy school, he was determined to protect them. So he told all he knew: what Hume had told him about Robert and Evans; what Edward and Nigel had found out about Cullen’s forgery and its connection to Evans and Harrington; the cloud of suspicion over his brother; and their conclusion that yesterday’s assailant was acting on Evans’s orders.

Sir John listened to the end of this faltering tale before asking, “Do you intend to bring charges against Mr. Evans and your brother, I wonder?”

Barton fell silent for a moment. “All this is inference,” he said finally. “There is no solid proof.” He explained that the anatomy school depended on Robert’s financial support, and that if his brother were accused of a crime, the school would be closed and his own research would come to an end. Accordingly, he certainly did not want Robert brought low.

“Circumstances do seem to point to the two of them,” said the magistrate, “but there is not a scrap of decisive evidence. There is also one thing that bothers me. As you tell it, after he escaped from Evans, Cullen ran to your school hoping for help from Mr. Turner and Mr. Hart, only to be

killed by the school's owner. How could the latter have known he would come, and waited for him?"

"That occurred to us also," said Clarence, and explained their theory about Robert's pet dog being used to give the alert.

"Edward thought it out," said Al. "He told Nigel, who passed it on to us."

"Then I shall investigate both Mr. Guy Evans and Dr. Robert Barton further. Should I discover overwhelming evidence, will you bring charges, Professor?"

Barton sighed. "I suppose I must."

"The trial would be in the Central Court," said Sir John, with his hand on a piece of paper lying on one of the workbenches.

"Ah—that is the record of Edward's injury," said Al. "We took notes when we examined him." He gave a quick summary of it.

"Autopsy practice," said Clarence. "Detailed records are always of later use. As I said before, leave the autopsies to us. Living clients also accepted."

"Sir John, I have a request," said Al. "Please ensure that Evans does not realize he is being investigated. He has the ear of the Lord Mayor and members of the House of Lords, and he disposes of those who interfere with his designs. There is no saying what he might do if he senses us nosing about."

"Also, Dr. Barton has done wrong in the past," said Clarence. "It is simply a fact. He took the Professor's and Edward's research and passed it off as his own."

"I cannot be partial to you in my approach," said Sir John. "You have said a good deal; now it must be proven—particularly after the parade of falsehoods offered by Messrs. Turner and Hart until now. The rest of you, too—claiming that a body found in the flue was lying on a dissecting table, and so on. There is no evidence even for your claim that Cullen was imprisoned by Evans, then ran here after his escape."

"That is not so," said Nigel. "We do have evidence: a letter Nathan wrote to us. It is in our bedroom—I shall go and fetch it."

"I believe I shall come with you. Anne, your assistance, please. Abbott, you wait here."

Telling the other three pupils to remain where they were as well, Barton

accompanied Nigel, the magistrate, and Miss Moore upstairs.

"Edward!" called Nigel, knocking on the door. "We are coming in. Sir John and Professor Barton are with me. Miss Moore, also."

Moore led Sir John towards Edward's bed. "I hear you have been treated roughly," the magistrate said. "May I touch your forehead, Mr. Turner?"

"Of course."

"You seem to have a fever."

Nigel then placed several folded sheets of paper in the magistrate's hand. "This is the letter. It was in Nathan's pocket. But we did not think it was for us, and had much to attend to—"

"Making the scene look more like a murder, for example."

"Unfortunately, yes. In any case, when we read the letter that night, we learnt about his confinement at the hands of Evans, the matter of the forgery, and the rest."

"Anne, please read it to us." Sir John let Nigel lead him to a chair and lowered himself onto it.

As Moore read the missive aloud, Barton noticed her pausing to observe Edward and Nigel closely, examining their expressions and movements. The contents of the letter did indeed back their claims.

"Mr. Turner," said Sir John when she had finished. "I see no point in questioning you, I think. You have proved yourself a vigorous liar already."

"Not for his own sake," protested Barton again. "It was all to protect me, my preparations, and the anatomy school."

"Professor, may I speak to you in private?"

"Let us repair to my study. There are things I wish to say, too. Miss Moore, I must ask you to absent yourself from our discussion. I shall guide Sir John."

"Do as he requests, Anne."

"What about me, Professor?" asked Nigel.

"Stay with Edward or go downstairs—whichever you prefer." He then took Sir John by the arm and led him away.

"Let us begin with what you wished to say," said the magistrate once they were inside the study.

"You must forgive Edward's refractory behaviour," said Barton. "His distrust of the courts will not easily be overcome. You see, in the town near

Southampton where he was born, his father, who was a clergyman's servant…" Barton retold the story, ending with Edward's mother moving the family to London, unable to bear life in their home town any longer, only to fall ill and die soon afterwards.

"The poor woman," Sir John said, the words barely audible from his full lips.

"He does not wish these matters to be widely known, which is why I asked Miss Moore to stay behind."

"And yet I shall tell Anne myself. She is part of me—my eyes. What I learn I am bound to share with her."

"If it must be so. But please remember that this tale is painful for my pupil."

"I shall bear it in mind. Now—about his injury."

"You noticed as well?"

"His attacker did not intend to kill him."

"I agree."

"The notes were quite instructive. The skin around the wound had opened outwards. In other words, the blade of the knife—as I take the weapon to be—was not directed inwards. It merely tore the skin. No one with intent to kill would hold their weapon in that way. The fact that the blade was horizontal might suggest that the assailant lacked intent even to wound, one is tempted to say."

Barton was unable to answer immediately, because he had felt the same doubts looking over the record himself.

"In other words, Turner had an acquaintance do it in order to place himself above suspicion. The attacker meant only to give him a scratch, but slipped and inflicted a deeper wound than expected."

"Above suspicion? Suspicion of what, pray?" Barton did not notice his voice growing sharper.

"You already know what I mean, I think. The suspicion that Turner was on the side of the perpetrators throughout this series of events. It is not uncommon for those in such a position to adopt the guise of victim."

"Impossible." Even as he dismissed the notion, however, Barton could not discard a last trace of doubt. Recent events had already forced him to recognize that Edward could be a shrewd schemer, and was rather too eager to hide things.

“If Anne’s account is accurate, Turner is rather fortunate in terms of looks.”

“I do not think that overstates the case.”

“I, of course, am blessed with immunity to appearances. Let me be frank: I find the man tiresome—quite unbearably so. That is the effect he has on me.”

“I cannot blame you for feeling that way, after his many half-truths and concealments—but I would urge you to try to see his good side too. Surely the injury was a threat from Evans. The latter may already have had my brother kill two men. The order to murder my two pupils as well would be going too far, so Evans is warning them to keep quiet about Cullen’s flair for forgery, as revealed in the letter.”

“Ah, yes, the letter. Was it really written by Cullen? We have no way to determine the truth. It may be a forgery itself.”

“It is not in the hand of either Edward or Nigel, at least. Evans should still have the manuscript of that poem that Cullen was working on, the *Elegy*. The letter could be compared with it. Only… that would clearly inform Evans that he was under suspicion… .”

“You are working on the assumption that Evans forced your brother to murder Harrington and the boy. However, as I said earlier, I am in no position to decide such things in the absence of solid evidence. Until I have such evidence, I must treat both sides impartially. Turner is still hiding something.”

“Until Edward recovers, I hope you will refrain from questioning him further.”

“His father was executed for a crime he did not commit. This you told me just now. Might Evans have been involved in that incident?”

“I had never heard of the man before Hume, my banker, mentioned him to me.”

“If Evans did in fact have Harrington and Nathan Cullen murdered to conceal the forgery, there is a simple way to prevent further criminal acts. We need only reveal to the world that his ‘mediaeval poems’ are, in practice, fraudulent.”

Barton thought for a moment. “However, neither Cullen nor Harrington, our two witnesses in the matter, are still with us. If we do not first prove the

supposition that Evans had Robert kill them—I say supposition, for it is not certain yet, although I think it likely myself—*Evans* might sue *us* for libel."

"Cullen's family must know his handwriting."

"Quite so. Have you made contact with his relatives?"

"We sent a letter by stage-coach to the mayor of Sherbourne, since we had no specific address. We urged him to inquire with the priest of each parish until Cullen's family was identified, then to inform them of their son's death and ask them to come and retrieve his body. The matter will take some days yet."

"Whatever protests Evans might make, if we made the matter public, he would have to keep his hands off Edward and Nigel, would he not?"

"I am sure he would refrain from pursuing the matter actively, yes."

"But what method to use to make it public?… A newspaper, I suppose. Hume might have some clients connected with reputable newspapers. Would they print an article with no backing, however?… But I must be bold and ask. This is no time to sit with arms folded. As for evidence… finding it is your concern. All I ask is that you decide correctly."

"The final verdict will be made by the judges and jurors of the Old Bailey, but I shall do my utmost to gather evidence sound enough to leave the jurors no choice but to hand down the correct judgement."

"I am sure you are right. The matter must not be heard in court before it is resolved. A skilful lawyer can turn black into white."

"I shall take this letter with me. I should also like to borrow something in the hand of Messrs. Turner and Hart, just in case. Additionally—and I hope you will forgive the insult—I need a sample of your own writing, and of your other three pupils'."

"Do you suppose that I, or one of them, concocted the letter from Cullen?"

"You all cooperated in deceiving me about the corpses in the fireplace."

"I shall assemble a selection."

"Is Robert at home now, I wonder?"

"I do not know. Shall I summon him?"

"No, I shall go myself. Perhaps you could call Anne."

Barton sighed deeply despite himself. It looked as if the anatomy school would not remain open much longer.

Chapter 12

Nathan advanced slowly, cautiously.

Footsteps approached behind him.

He froze.

Chapter 13

Back at home, Sir John had his dinner and then moved to his private chambers to put his feet up and enjoy a cup of coffee brought in by the maid.

The chair in which he sat had been in his possession so long that its cushioned parts were moulded to his body, supporting him snugly.

He heard Anne removing her violin from its case. This was their custom when he was taking his ease. She anticipated his wants before he needed to voice them.

A minuet by Bach soon filled the air. His late wife had loved to play this piece. Sir John did not know what she had looked like, having gone blind before their marriage. Instead, he knew the touch of her skin, the feel of her hair, her rather low speaking voice and her decorous laugh. His lips remembered every inch of her. When she played the violin, he would sometimes slip his head under her dress and distract her. She would scold him, saying that it was an offence against the music, to which he would reply that he was simply listening in the most agreeable environment. Before long, though, her playing would flow into him, flooding him to a depth beyond words, and he would cease his mischief and only listen. Now he had no one with whom he could behave as intimately.

Listening now to Anne's performance, he thought again how astonishing it was that such sweet sounds should come from horse hair scraped across catgut. Those who made violin strings lived near slaughter-houses, to give them easy access to raw materials. These ill-paid artisans would cut open a sheep's belly, remove yards and yards of intestine, scrape off the fat and muscle and blood vessels, squeeze out the bile, and soak it in cleansing ash solution. The wider end of the gut so processed they put aside to sell for sausage-skin. The narrow end was sliced into fibrous ribbons, which in turn were twisted into strings. All done by people who would most likely never hear a violin played… . These musings came to Sir John unbidden, perhaps inspired by his recent association with the anatomist and his pupils.

* * *

His attempt to meet the elder Barton brother that day had been unsuccessful.

After leaving the anatomy school, rather than go around to the front of Robert's house, which was in Leicester Square, he simply crossed the courtyard and inquired at the rear entrance instead. The servant who answered the door had struggled to conceal his surprise at seeing a magistrate there.

"I wish to see Dr. Robert Barton. Please tell him that the magistrate John Fielding has business with him."

"He is not at home, sir."

"Where has he gone?"

"I don't know, sir, but he should be back directly. Bess! Do not lick the magistrate's shoes."

A shabbily dressed man moved past the servant through the door at a crouch, out into the courtyard.

"Clean the stables while you're at it!" the servant called after him.

The man turned. "I ain't no stable-boy," he replied, before hurrying away into the rear lane.

"He comes daily to clean the kennel," explained the servant with a grimace. "If only you had called at the front entrance, sir, you might have been spared that encounter."

"I suppose that Dr. Barton has a personal carriage?"

"Yes, sir. His medical practice requires as much. His driver drinks, however, and is nothing but trouble."

"When Dr. Barton does return, pray have him call on me at my office in Bow Street."

Sir John had then returned there on his own, given instructions to two or three officers who were waiting for them, and decided to take a short break before having Anne read him the reports that had arrived in his absence.

As he was asking her to read one particular thing again, they were interrupted by a visitor: City Marshal Charles Hitchin.

"I have no business in particular, but happened to be in the neighbourhood," said Hitchin, almost apologetically. Sir John was on cordial terms with him professionally, but they had no special friendship. "I understand that Sir Saunders is sitting in court today, and thought you might be free."

"I am not, in fact," Sir John said bluntly. "Though not at court, I have more things to do than hours to do them in."

“In that case, please accept my apologies.” He turned to leave.

“Was it about the pamphlet?”

An anonymous document attacking Hitchin was currently in circulation. A copy had been delivered to the magistrate’s office some days before.

“Pay no heed to such things,” continued Sir John. “I certainly do not.”

“You are very kind… . Its content was arrant nonsense, of course. Those who would impede my advancement are legion, and—”

“Yes, I know it. I might observe, however, that it should not bother me even if the claims in the pamphlet were true, as long as trials are conducted fairly. Of course, one does prefer those involved with the law to be of the highest integrity.”

“As I said, those claims are the basest libel—”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Sir John, waving him away.

There were many pubs with a low reputation in London, and some were chiefly frequented by those who preferred the company of their own sex. The pamphlet had accused Hitchin of being a regular patron at the Rose, which was one such establishment.

Pubs like the Rose had back rooms for changing in, since no man of any standing could leave his house dressed in women’s clothing. Some establishments even allowed regulars to store clothing and cosmetics there, and offered rental services too.

> Adorned in Clothing intended for Women, Marshal Charles Hitchin is addressed by other Patrons as *Your Ladyship*. In the Den of Iniquity he favours, men call each other *Dear*, embrace, and even kiss. Hitchin is enamoured of a Boy (perhaps a young Actor specializing in female Roles) whom the others call *Titania*, and gladly dons the Head of an Ass in exchange for his Favourite’s Caresses.
>
> Does one of such Degeneracy have any Place in the practice of Law?

Sir John smiled wryly, after their visitor had left. “Do you suppose he is calling on every member of the legal profession with whom he has any acquaintance, to insist on the pamphlet’s inaccuracy? I fear the result may be the opposite of what he intends.”

“Who do you suppose is trying to bring him down?” asked Anne.

“Someone aligned with a defendant in one of his trials, I imagine. Their lawyer might be behind it. To judge from his voice, Hitchin does not sound like a man whose figure would be flattered by women’s clothing.”

"He is twice the size of Benjamin Beamis. Perhaps thrice, in dress and petticoat."

"Ah, well. We must get back to work. Please read that letter again."

Edward, Nigel,

Help me.

I am imprisoned against my will. I have no way to communicate with you.

Escape is my intention. I hope to find my way to you somehow, but I cannot predict whether I shall reach you alive or dead.

Below I record all the events leading up to my present circumstances. If I am unable to speak for myself when found, read this instead.

My gaoler is a man called Guy Evans. He lives in London, but I do not know the address… .

When Anne reached the end of it, Sir John handed her the writing samples he had received from Barton. There were six: one for each pupil, and one for Barton himself.

"Compare these, if you would."

"All six differ markedly from the hand in which the letter is written," said Anne after a few moments. Then, clearly vexed, she added, "Mr. Barton's writing is highly idiosyncratic. I wonder whether someone who took his prescription to an apothecary would receive the correct medicine."

"How I regret my inability to see it for myself," smiled Sir John. "The boy's letter is quite long. One might be able to imitate another's hand for a line or two, but surely not for a work of that length. Not without some difficulty."

"I agree. You think the letter might be a forgery, Sir John?"

"Evans and Harrington conspired to manipulate stock prices. We can consider this a fact, I suppose. Robert Barton incurred great losses as a result. Here, too, I imagine that Mr. Hume is telling the truth, although we require evidence that can be submitted in court. Why should Evans consider it necessary to kill Harrington? Turner offers as motivation Harrington's knowledge of the boy's forgery… but this idea rests on the assumption that the letter to Messrs. Turner and Hart is genuine."

"Do you mean to suggest that Mr. Turner wrote the letter to back his own claims, then had it copied out by someone else?"

"Such a thing is certainly possible. He lies without a hint of unease. You

said he was handsome?"

"Yes."

"I suppose, as a young woman, you fell under his spell," he teased.

"I do not allow emotion to interfere with my investigations," she retorted.

"I know it, Anne. Now, pray read the rest of the reports."

But Abbott entered the room before she could begin. "Mr. Hume from the Temple Bank has arrived as you requested, sir."

Sir John had Anne put the papers away again.

"Were you aware that Edward Turner was attacked and wounded on the street?"

Sir John heard Hume gasp, then cry: "By him?!"

"'Him'?"

"By Evans… . Excuse me." He struggled to get his breathing back under control after his outburst. "Was the wound deep? Surely not fatal? Sir John, is your business with me urgent? If you permit, I should like to call on Edward straight away. You see, he suspected that he and his colleague Nigel Hart would be Evans's next target… . Did Nigel escape any harm?"

"Only Mr. Turner was hurt. His assailant seems to have slashed at his side as they passed each other."

"Evans would never expose himself to such risk. Who can he have used as an accomplice?"

"Calm yourself, sir. No serious harm was done. Now, I understand that Mr. Turner called on you yesterday?"

"He did."

"On what business?" he asked, knowing the answer already.

"I had discussed a certain matter with him the previous day, and he came again to confirm some of the details. Edward helped—that is, Mr. Turner helped my wife through a difficult birth, alongside Professor Barton—Daniel, I mean, not his brother. Thanks to them, both mother and child are in good health, and my son dotes on Edward. Afterwards, Nigel—Mr. Hart—arrived to report that Barton was on his way. Then he and Edward left together. Did it happen on their way home?"

"They stopped at a coffee-house and were attacked as they left. Fortunately, one of my officers was nearby and came to their aid—regrettably allowing the attacker to escape. I myself did not see Mr. Turner

until today, as I was in court yesterday. The Evans you mentioned just now —I presume you mean the broker, Guy Evans?"

"I do. Yet… why would—" Hume abruptly fell silent, but it sounded to the magistrate as if the next word had been "Nigel."

"May I inquire what you were about to say?"

"Oh—nothing. Sir John, allow me to abandon my banker's discretion and condemn Guy Evans for some vile crimes. I believe he is guilty of forcing Robert Barton to kill the boy Cullen and the journalist Harrington."

"I know it is an incongruous request, Mr. Hume, but would you be so kind as to place your hand on top of mine?"

Startled, Hume began to rise from his chair.

"You may remain seated. My hand should be within reach."

Sir John had his left hand out, palm up. Hume placed his own hand on top of it, and the magistrate covered it with his right.

"Lacking the sense of sight, I am obliged to rely on hearing and smell instead," he explained. "Sometimes I also employ the sense of touch. I need your co-operation in this matter, and hope you will forgive me using the latter sense to confirm that you can be trusted."

"Whatever co-operation you need from me you may depend upon."

"All I ask is that you tell me the truth."

He felt Hume's hand firmly grip his own.

"You know the identity of the two corpses?" the magistrate asked.

"Yesterday, when Edward visited me, he revealed in detail his suspicions of Evans in the matter of Cullen's and Harrington's deaths. I take it you have heard about the Pacific Company, and Cullen's forged poem."

"Pray tell me in your own words."

Hume complied. His story was identical to the one Barton and Edward had told.

"Are you acquainted with Guy Evans?" asked Sir John.

"We have only exchanged pleasantries, but I know his face."

"I have heard the rumours that Evans was connected with the Pacific crash, but is there anything that might constitute evidence of this?"

"He was not 'connected' with it, sir. He controlled the whole affair. As there is no firm evidence to that effect, you might dismiss this as conjecture, but…"

"You refer, perhaps, to his reputation for helping the Lord Mayor,

various members of Parliament, and other powerful figures earn large profits?"

"Many people seem to think so." He thought for a moment. "You might obtain some relevant information by asking at Jonathan's, the coffee-house in Change Alley. I have never been there myself, but a group of the more important brokers pay its owner eight pounds a year for the right to hold a private three-hour meeting there weekly, to discuss their business."

"That is most helpful," said Sir John. "My thanks. Jonathan's in Change Alley. I shall investigate. By the by, did you ever meet Nathan Cullen?"

"No, I only heard about him from Edward. An awful business. Edward is convinced that Evans forced Robert Barton to help smooth the way to passing off a forgery as the genuine article. I am inclined to agree. It may be wrong to express opinions based only on guesswork, but I cannot think of any better explanation for the facts."

Sir John's hands had grown warm. Hume placed his own left hand on top of them all and shook them vigorously.

"While this matter remains unresolved, Edward and Nigel remain in danger of being attacked again."

"You think that it was an agent of Evans's who wounded Mr. Turner?"

"Who else might it be? Edward is not the sort of person to make enemies."

"You think that Evans arranged it because of what the two friends knew of Cullen's talent?"

"Yes. I beg you, do something about that man. Dr. Barton, too."

"We cannot yet conclude that either is guilty. Evidence is required. Why should Dr. Barton accept such a hazardous commission? If he were caught, he would be hanged."

"To have his debts wiped clean. Barring drastic action, he faced financial ruin."

"I see… . Incidentally, Mr. Hume, will you write the name 'Guy Evans' here for me?"

Again, Hume seemed startled, but when handed paper and a pen, he complied.

Saying he was off to see Edward, he then hurried out of the room. One of the magistrate's officers, arriving to deliver a report, passed him in the doorway.

"We spoke to Guy Evans's staff," the officer told Sir John, "but all denied he had ever done anything such as hold a young man captive. Nor did the offer of money change their stories."

"You took care to ensure that Evans himself was not aware of your inquiries, of course."

"Yes, sir."

If the servants had received a sufficient bribe from their master, the small amount his officers could offer was unlikely to loosen their tongues. What's more, they would report the matter to Evans. Sir John recalled the request for secrecy that Barton's pupil Albert Wood had made. "*He has the ear of the Lord Mayor and members of the House of Lords, and he disposes of those who interfere with his designs. There is no saying what he might do if he senses us nosing about.*"

If they were to seize him by the tail, however, they had to flush him out.

"What of Evans's family?"

"He does not seem to have any."

After the officer had left, Sir John had Anne compare Hume's written *Guy Evans* with the handwriting of the letter: *My gaoler is a man called Guy Evans…*

"They are quite different."

"What was your impression of Hume?"

"His surprise and concern when he heard of Turner's injury appeared to be heartfelt. His attitude afterwards was also sincere. However, when you asked him if he had ever met Nathan Cullen, although he denied it immediately, I detected a hint of nervousness in his expression."

"I thought his denial too quick myself—even indignant. His hand twitched also. But even if he had met the boy, why lie about it?"

"It does not make sense."

"Anne, there is something I should tell you. Turner's father was hanged for the theft of silverware from a church. Later, it was discovered that he was innocent."

"How awful!"

"Sympathy for his misfortune will not cloud your judgement, I hope."

"Absolutely not."

"Something about the matter of the ink seems unnatural to me, Anne. Suppose that Cullen were rendered unconscious and laid on a dissecting

table to have his wrist slit. He regains his senses, but is weak from blood loss. When he realizes his situation, would he not first attempt to staunch the bleeding? Even if this proves impossible, he would surely at least remove his hand from the water. How could he open the inkpot with his left hand so immersed? Turner said that Cullen always carried writing implements on his person. Did he hold the inkpot in his right hand, brace it against the table, and use only his right fingers and thumb to remove the lid? And did he then dip three—and only three—fingers into it, one by one? Without spilling a drop?"

"Are you implying that the sign in ink was put there by Turner and Hart, after they found the boy dead on the table, hand in the basin? As a ruse to make us think that he had been murdered, and that the murderer was Dr. Barton?"

"I believe that the boy killed himself, and that they took measures to disguise it as a murder. For the sake of argument, let us accept their story as they told it. But the idea that the boy used three fingers to draw a fountain which Robert Barton covered with a roundel—this, surely, was a trick intended to cast suspicion on the doctor. Turner simply poured ink on Cullen's chest and used the boy's three fingers to spread it. It is unprovable, but it seems far more natural than any alternative. It beggars belief that someone on the verge of death should open an inkpot one-handed without staining any part of themselves but the tips of three fingers. No, Messrs. Turner and Hart have layered deception on deception in order to lead us to the conclusion that Dr. Barton was the murderer."

"But how does it benefit them to do this? If he were executed, their school would be shut down and the Professor forced to end his research. And it seems to me that all his pupils have the highest respect and affection for him. The work of dissection is hardly a popular one. Their interest in it is largely due to him."

"Barton's preparations could all be lost to his elder brother's debts, anyway. Turner knows this. Even if he did nothing, they might disappear. In that case, why not at least pin the murder on the elder Barton as an act of revenge? The Chatterbox mentioned that Dr. Barton stole not only specimens but research from both Turner and the Professor. Presumably Turner nurses a personal animus against him as a result."

"I see… ."

“Anne, defend the young man. In no way do I wish to find him a criminal. I am simply theorizing about the suspicious side of his behaviour. Flushing out inconsistencies helps reveal the truth. Certainly, we cannot say that Dr. Barton has behaved blamelessly. Perhaps he *was* compelled by Evans to murder Harrington and Cullen. But, at the very least, the matter of the ink is unnatural.”

“We also need to know whether the letter is a forgery or not. If we could find the bookshop involved, we could compare the forged poem with the letter-writer’s hand… . Oh, but if the poem was written in imitation of a mediaeval scribe, it would differ from his natural hand… .”

“He must have left some writings at his home. Once we locate his family and bring them to London, they can confirm the letter’s handwriting for us. Another coffee, if you please, Anne, and pour one for yourself. Then let us continue with the reports.”

A little later, she told him: “This one was taken from a waiter at Matthew’s. He remembered an insolent youth, name unknown, who came every day and did nothing but write. The boy was reportedly close to Turner and Hart, who were regular customers. All three were there when a passer-by once came to the coffee-house to complain about being drenched by the fountain outside, though the waiter did not know the name of this man, either.” She put down the report. “We have determined that the fountain incident did take place, but our only sources for the claim that it was Robert Barton who was drenched are Turner and Hart.

“The next report,” she went on, “contains the autopsy results from Dr. Osborne. The boy’s body had multiple scars, but none from a fatal wound. He was gaunt and weak. Dr. Osborne thinks it not unlikely that his final weeks were debilitating.”

“Which gives some backing to the letter’s allegations of abuse and starvation as punishment for slow progress on the poem.”

“Yes. Regarding the faceless cadaver suspected of belonging to Thomas Harrington, Dr. Osborne found no sign of poisoning, although putrefaction was sufficiently advanced to make it difficult to be sure. As far as can be ascertained, the cause of death was strangulation, at least four or five days ago.”

“More uncertainty. Professor Barton is quite correct: more cadavers are

needed to advance the science and improve our autopsy results. Now, where was Robert Barton four or five days ago?"

The latter had been summoned to the magistrate's office two days ago in connection with the body of Elaine Roughhead. On that occasion, he had mentioned spending his time recently with his family at his wife's parents' home. They were wealthy gentry with a sprawling estate in Marlow, not far from London, he had explained; his wife was often there, preferring it to life in the city. He had been there with her this time, enjoying some rest himself, when Sir Charles had called him back to London, where (at Sir Charles's request) he had helped ensure that Elaine's suicide by arsenic ingestion should be viewed as a death from illness. These measures, he explained, had been taken to prevent damage being done to the family's reputation; he was sure Sir John would understand.

"As for signs of a struggle, it seems that the skin has deteriorated too much for any marks to be detected," continued Anne.

"To strangle a man takes strength. But two people might manage the job easily if they worked together. Consider this possibility: Evans invites Harrington to his home. Harrington has no reason to suspect him of any sinister intent; his guard is down. Evans mixes laudanum or some such drug into Harrington's drink. Once Harrington has lost consciousness, Evans strangles him and leaves the disposal of the body to Robert Barton. Or perhaps he had Robert do the strangling for him… . What is in the next report?"

"Some important new evidence," Anne said, excitement in her voice. "It was discovered by the constables searching the offices of the *Public Journal*. From interviews with two of Harrington's employees, they learnt that, while Harrington himself wrote most of the articles in the newspaper, the satirical verse under the pseudonym 'N. Pym' was an exception—and 'N. Pym,' they say, was Nathan Cullen's pen-name."

Sir John waited in silence while Anne compared the letter from Cullen to the manuscripts by 'N. Pym' that the constables had brought in.

"There is no mistake," she said finally. "The letter was written by Cullen himself."

"You sound pleased, Anne."

"No, Sir John, not at all."

"Edward Turner said that they did not think the letter was addressed to

them, and so did not read it until after they had finished the job—but Anne, does this not strike you as unnatural, too? The corpse had a letter on its person. Surely anyone discovering it would read the letter first. In it we learn of his confinement by Evans, of his wretched experience in Newgate, of the marks of shame still remaining on his legs. Robert Barton's name is not mentioned. Our ingenious—or should I say devious?—friend Edward Turner knew already of the relationship between Evans and Robert. Perhaps he already suspected that Evans was using Robert as a cat's-paw for murder. What he lacked, however, was proof. And so, to direct our gaze towards Robert, he hatches a scheme involving the corpse… ."

"Ah. I see."

"Bring out Cullen's clothes—the ones we took from the Barton residence." In due course, he asked, "Are the ink stains over the pocket still there?"

"They are."

"Is the letter also stained?"

"Somewhat."

"Fold the letter up along its creases and place it inside the pocket. Does the ink-stain on the letter match the one on the clothing?" Sir John waited, then sensed her consternation. "Well?" he asked.

"The stains do not match," she said simply.

"Curious indeed."

"Perhaps Edward and—that is, Turner and Hart remembered incorrectly, and the letter was somewhere other than in Cullen's pocket. I shall ask the two of them again."

"Let us delay that for a while. Are there any more reports today?"

"None."

"The grave-robbers who sold Miss Roughhead's corpse to Mr. Barton are still being detained, I believe?"

"Yes. Gobbin and Dick are in a holding cell."

At this point, a servant entered to announce the arrival of Dr. Robert Barton.

"Anne, when Dr. Barton leaves, have Abbott follow him. Will he go directly home? Or will he use a more suspicious route?"

"I shall follow him too."

"You are my eyes. You are to remain here."

“The surveillance may require more than one person.”

“Then have someone else form a team with Abbott.”

“There is no one else. Everyone is out. We need more officers.”

“Very well, then. But you are not to approach any dangerous locations. And should danger arise, leave matters to Abbott and retire.”

“Yes, sir.” Her reluctance to accept these instructions was apparent.

“You are not equipped for a contest of physical strength. Your talents lie in observation and deduction. If imperilled, you are to run, and then provide an accurate report of what transpired. That, and that alone, is your assignment.”

“I understand.”

“Anne, I repeat, there would be no shame in withdrawing alone. On the contrary: to run is your duty. Bear that in mind.”

With this final admonition, Sir John had her open the door.

“My apologies for my absence earlier,” said Robert Barton. “I hurried here as soon as my servant conveyed your message to me.”

Restlessness, apprehension, nervousness: there was much that Sir John could sense in his voice.

“However, it has been just two days since our last meeting,” Robert continued.

“In connection with the Roughhead girl and the arsenic, yes.”

Robert had been flustered then too, he reminded himself.

“I have more questions I wish to ask you,” Sir John said. “But first, a request.” He imposed the same test on Robert as he had on Hume, and clasped the man’s right hand between both of his own.

“You used a carriage to transport Harrington, did you not?”

A moment passed. “I beg your pardon?” said Robert, suspicion in his voice. But his hand had already betrayed its owner: in that initial moment of silence, there had been a definite twitch.

“You drove the horses yourself. Do I have that correct?”

“What is this about?”

“Who was it that did the deed, then?” asked Sir John, feeling a minute tremor transmitted through his palm. “You, or Mr. Evans?”

“Sir John, I fear you have lost me.”

“What was the exact date of your departure for Marlow?”

“Did I not say earlier? It was the third of July. I arrived back in London

four days ago—the eighth—after receiving Sir Charles's summons."

"You remained at Marlow from the third to the seventh? Not visiting London once during that time?"

"Sir John, is this an interrogation? If so, I shall have no choice but to bring suit for a grave insult to my honour. I know suing a magistrate is no easy matter, but I believe I can impose on the Lord Mayor of London and a member of Parliament to see that my claim is taken up directly by William, Lord Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench."

"Have I said anything to insult you, I wonder? All I asked was whether you used a carriage to transport Harrington and when you went to Marlow. What has caused you such agitation?"

"It must surely be some suspicion you have that made you inquire about these matters. In any case, I know neither a Harrington nor an Evans."

"From the third of July to the seventh, you were in Marlow."

"Correct."

"During that period, you did not return to London once."

"Correct."

"Anne, have you written all this down?"

"Yes, Sir John."

"Dr. Barton, pray examine the transcript of our conversation. If you are satisfied that all was recorded accurately, I would have your signature on it."

"My signature? To what end?"

"We would not want arguments later over what was said and what was not."

"What is the meaning of this? You treat me as if I were a suspect."

"If you were one, the interrogation should be much more severe. What we have enjoyed is a casual exchange, nothing more. Does your reluctance to sign indicate that there was something in our conversation inconvenient to you, or which injured your honour?"

"No. Of course not. I shall sign."

The magistrate released his grip on Robert's right hand.

Even with a signature, this would not be a formal record. Nor would it be admissible as evidence in court.

Chapter 14

Dennis Abbott left slightly ahead of Anne, who was delayed by the need to change into clothing suitable for a woman. Dressing as a man was simpler and allowed her more ease of movement, but as she was clearly a woman it also attracted attention.

When she finally stepped outside, neither Robert Barton nor Abbott were anywhere to be seen, but there was no need to fear the trail going cold. At several street corners stood a child ready to point her in the right direction. These were children who usually lived off meagre tips received in exchange for carrying luggage or pushing wagons; the Bow Street Runners had earned their trust with regular gifts of money and food, and today Abbott had made sure to leave instructions with them as he passed.

She set out along the Strand, parallel to the easterly course of the Thames for twenty minutes or so. When she arrived at the Royal Exchange on Cornhill, she saw a flower-girl on the corner across the street from her, pointing into the narrow lane between the buildings on that side: Change Alley. Abbott was waiting for her in front of a building to the left, holding a small bunch of violets. He tucked the violets into her neckline and casually indicated the sign outside one establishment in particular: Jonathan's. This was the coffee-house Hume had mentioned—the one favoured by stock traders.

Pretending to converse with Abbott as if they were a couple, Anne glanced through the windows. Robert was inside, sitting alone and sipping irritably at a cup of coffee.

"As soon as he entered, he wrote a note and handed it to a waiter," said Abbott. "The waiter gave it to a messenger boy. Presumably he is awaiting a reply."

Perhaps fifteen minutes later, a ragged boy ran up and knocked on the coffee-house door. When a waiter emerged, the boy passed on some message. The waiter nodded, shoved him away without tipping him, and closed the door again.

Anne called the boy over as he walked by, still indignant, and bought him an eel pie from a passing merchant. With a few coins thrown into the bargain, the boy was all smiles again. They asked him where he had been sent.

“Mr. Evans’s place,” he said.

“What was the reply?”

“‘Cocks.’”

“‘Cocks’?”

“Aye.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Anne, with some disapproval, saw Abbott hand him a few more coins and whisper a few words. The boy ran towards Cornhill and jumped onto the back of a passing hackney.

Before long, Robert Barton emerged. The two watchers exchanged a glance and started after him, mingling with the crowd.

They went west again, retracing their steps back to Covent Garden. Anne expected Robert to return home, but he turned left instead, entering the maze of back streets around Charing Cross.

That the Tom Queen was an establishment of somewhat—nay, exceedingly—dubious character was clear from the imagery on the sign jutting out above the door, on which a female hand beckoned seductively, indicating the availability of more than just food and drink inside.

Opened by a retired non-commissioned officer in the Army, the pub was frequented by wastrel scions of the gentry, wealthy merchants, foremen, and leaders of local gangs: men from a variety of social strata, united by a fondness for betting games and consorting with whores. The upper crust attended in domino masks that hid half their faces; in fact, most of the patrons favoured this sinister-looking device. Unlike the Rose, the Tom Queen did not cater exclusively to men who preferred their own sex, but it did have many regular patrons of that persuasion. A room at the back set aside for their use was full of men in women’s clothing and heavily laid-on powder, teasing each other in high-pitched voices.

On a narrow table near the entrance, phials of medicine, eyeglasses, masks, pipes, and more were laid out for sale. The walls to both left and right were decorated with small-swords and grenadiers’ bayonets and powder-boxes, and on the wall directly ahead hung an obscene painting of a monk and a nun.

This was certainly one of the “dangerous locations” that had concerned Sir John, but Anne paid no heed, striding in and taking a domino mask from the table alongside Abbott.

The stairs to the second floor were all but vertical. Instead of a banister,

a rope hung from nails hammered into the wall here and there. The rope was black from use.

Robert Barton stepped carefully over a man and woman lying sprawled at the foot of the stairs. The rope was less helpful than it might have been had the nails been embedded more firmly in the wall, but Robert made his way upwards with practiced ease. A young woman was just coming down. As they passed on the stairs, Robert's foot slipped. One hand shot out against the wall for support, and he swore as a nail head went into his palm. "Watch yourself, you stupid trollop!" he told her. The woman's face was plastered with white powder and dotted liberally with beauty spots; her eyes were concealed by a domino mask and her lipstick and rouge were vivid in colour. She grabbed the hem of her lace- and bead-adorned dress and the petticoat beneath it, raised them high, and brought them down over Abbott's head with a vulgar cackle as he attempted to follow Robert up.

Anne scraped past them and went on ahead.

Cock-fighting was said to have been introduced to Britannia some forty years before the birth of Christ, by the Romans, who invaded, conquered, and ruled the backwater isle as a *provincia* for more than three hundred years. Over the course of the intervening centuries, the practice had been abandoned by France, Holland, Germany, and other parts of continental Europe, but England's affection for it had not waned. In the eighteenth century, it ranked alongside bull-, bear-, and rat-baiting as one of the most popular pastimes of London's citizenry.

Bull- and bear-baiting involved tying a long rope around the neck of the animal in question, inducing several vicious dogs to attack it, and enjoying the show. Bear-baiting in particular had been one of the favourite pastimes of Queen Elizabeth two centuries earlier. When her lover, the Earl of Leicester, invited her to his imposing home, bear-baiting had been part of the entertainment. The Queen developed a taste for it, even having a bear-pit constructed exclusively for royal use. It was a form of entertainment with a venerable pedigree.

Rat-baiting was a type of sport in which patrons placed bets on whether a single dog would be able to kill all the rats it was pitted against in a certain period of time. Cock-fighting was another betting game, involving tournaments of two kinds: "Welsh Main" and "Battle Royal." Those held in

the cock-pit on the second floor of the Tom Queen were the latter sort, in which multiple birds fought until only one was still standing.

The cock-pit was a circular area with a raised gallery around it for spectators. It was currently occupied by a small army of roosters with steel spurs attached to their legs, fighting a bloody war of all against all. A dozen or so had already fallen, injured or dead. The spectators urged the others "Go on!" "Carve 'im up!" The money they had bet would either be returned many times over or evaporate. Those who had bet on one of the birds that had already been defeated still stood there restlessly, reluctant to leave.

Cocks, Anne realized, had been code for the Tom Queen, with its permanent cock-pit.

Robert Barton parted the crowd to make his way across the room, then opened one of the two doors at the back and disappeared inside.

Anne leaned against the closed door and listened carefully. Abbott stood beside her. Here, too, they behaved like a couple, so that none of the male patrons should bother her.

The cries and curses of the spectators; the keening of those who had wagered and lost; the cheers that rose when a cock fell; the sound of the birds themselves, sometimes breaching the pit and attacking the crowd in their excitement. Shouts and laughter. The din so assaulted her ears that Anne was quite unable to hear what was happening beyond the door.

She carefully tried the doorknob. Locked.

"Well, this certainly is the perfect place for a private meeting," she said in Abbott's ear.

The brevity of the message Robert had received and his practiced response suggested that he and Evans often used it.

Anne crouched down and pressed her eye to the keyhole, but saw nothing. The key appeared to have been inserted from the other side, blocking all light.

She called to mind the way Robert had entered the room. He had knocked lightly, then turned the knob and pushed the door open immediately. She had not heard whether any reply had come from within, but the door did not seem to have been locked at the time. Robert must have locked it behind him.

She realized that the wall separating the room he had entered from the

one beside it might be quite thin and she might be able to hear something through it.

At her urging, Abbott tried the other doorknob, but was interrupted by a man who seemed to be an employee.

"You can't just help yourself to the rooms, friend," he said.

"How much?"

The man named a sum. They handed over slightly more. He stuffed it in his pocket. "Someone's still using that one," he said. "I'll let you know when it's free."

The rooms seemed to be used for more than just talk.

By now the cock-pit presented a lurid scene. One of the surviving birds had just faltered, and several others had converged on it. Hacking with their spurs, they reduced their weakened rival to a lump of bloodstained meat and feathers. The cries of the spectators rose: "Stand, damn you!" "Don't give in now!" "Kill 'im!"

How long was Robert going to be talking in there? Anne was getting impatient. She checked her pocket-watch: thirteen minutes past seven. He had entered the room almost an hour ago.

"Shall we interrupt them?" she said to Abbott.

Sir John had told her only to follow Robert. But if she could not hear the content of his secret conversation, she could not just fold her arms and wait.

"Dr. Barton said he did not know anyone called Evans. If we can catch the two of them meeting in secret, it will prove that he was lying."

Abbott knocked as loudly on the door as the noise of the spectators would permit, but there was no answer.

Anne summoned the proprietor.

"On the orders of the magistrate's office, open this door."

"The man who rented it has the key inside with him."

"You must have a spare."

"Magistrate's orders or not, I can't just open up… . And you don't look like one of their officers, either."

"I am one—a Bow Street Runner."

"A female Runner? I'll bet!"

"In that case, by the authority of the magistrate's office, I must close this establishment down."

More than Anne's words, it was the way Abbott looked that made the owner give in.

"Pardon me," he called through the door. "Opening up." He selected a key from his key-chain and tried it in the lock. "Trouble is, the key was inserted from the other side and left half-turned," he said. "We can't get in from here."

Abbott kicked the door open. There was no reaction within.

"Please don't break anything else."

Noticing the fuss, some of the spectators had gathered at the door instead, hoping for entertainment. Abbott shouted at them, teeth bared, and they backed away.

"You owe me a door," protested the publican weakly.

Chapter 15

"The deceased was lying on the sofa."

Sir John took his supper as he listened to her report. Anne sat at the table with him, her own place laid as well.

"A white silk cravat was wrapped tight around his neck, so we suspect strangulation. Fortunately for my appetite, he was not stabbed." Sir John heard her knife against the plate as she cut her steak.

The cook had learned his trade in Paris, meaning that even a Frenchman could be invited to dinner without fear of snide remarks about John Bull and bird seed. But the sauce today did not seem up to the usual standard. This led Sir John to the realization that he had a blocked nose. Had he caught a cold despite its being summer? He blew his nose noisily, but found no relief.

"It seems to have been his own cravat."

"And Robert Barton was nowhere to be found."

"The only person in the room was the cadaver."

"Describe to me the state of the room at the time."

"The door had been locked from the inside, with the key still in the lock. Abbott kicked it open. Viewed from the entrance, there was a table, and beyond that a sofa against the left wall. On the right were two elbow-chairs. A heavier chair was pushed against the wall facing the door, slightly to the left of the window. Tied to it was a long piece of fabric, with the other end hanging out of the window."

"He escaped through the window?"

"It seems so. We pulled up the fabric to examine it. Hanging vertically, it was roughly two yards long. If he had used it to climb down, he would have reached its limit dangling about seven yards above the ground. Perhaps he leapt that final distance. It would be quite dangerous, but not impossible. He may have injured his legs. The window opens onto a very narrow alley with no traffic, and we are still investigating whether there were any witnesses… . But, to return to the room itself: on the right-hand side was an alcove and a canopy bed for assignations, with a curtain pulled shut around it. We looked inside, of course. It was empty, with no signs of recent use."

"Was there anywhere else he could have been hiding?"

“No. The room had some shelves, but they afforded no hiding-place. There was a bottle of wine and a glass on the table. The bottle was open and the glass showed signs of having been used. Also, a bunch of grapes on a plate, a few of which seemed to have been eaten. According to the publican, when Evans used that room, the wine was placed there in advance. The owner laid on the grapes, too. Evans was a good customer, he said, so he provided these little services for him, and included the cost in the price of the room. The wine bottle and the grapes have been entrusted to Dr. Osborne to determine if either was poisoned.

“Now, the publican gave the name of the deceased as John Smith. He did not know the names ‘Guy Evans’ or ‘Robert Barton.’ It seems that ‘John Smith’ had arranged some six months earlier to use the room from five to eight o’clock each Monday and Wednesday afternoon. Neither Abbott nor I know what Evans looks like, but under the circumstances it is hard to imagine who else it might be. Presumably he was using a false name. I believe that he made use of the Tom Queen for conversations too sensitive to hold in Jonathan’s. Although the proprietor was not familiar with any ‘Robert Barton,’ he did recognize him as a customer who sometimes occupied the room with ‘John Smith.’ I suspect that Evans also availed himself of several other locations for these secret meetings, as using one only would attract attention.

“Regarding the body, we instructed a member of the staff to purchase the cheapest coffin he could find and have it delivered, with a letter requesting an autopsy, to Dr. Osborne.

“I then sent Abbott to Evans’s residence, post-haste. If Robert Barton had killed Evans, he would surely move to destroy the IOU in Evans’s possession as his very next act. I had some officers who had returned to Bow Street join Abbott to assist with the arrest, and sent several others to Robert’s residence, in case he went there first. I also dispatched a message to Mr. Hume at the Temple Bank, requesting that he call at Dr. Osborne’s to confirm whether the deceased is Guy Evans. I hope you will forgive my taking these measures before delivering my report to you, Sir John. Time seemed of the essence.”

“You have handled the matter flawlessly, Anne. Was Robert aware that you and Abbott were following him?”

“I believe not.”

“In which case, why would he not simply leave by the door, rather than flee through the window?”

“Yes, that *is* hard to explain. Perhaps he *did* notice us. Or perhaps, in what may have been a dishevelled state, he did not wish to be seen by the spectators at the cock-fight.”

“Why do you think he killed Evans?”

“If your questioning revealed that he himself was under suspicion, he may have decided to ensure the other’s silence.”

“If Evans died under those circumstances, Robert would be the prime suspect.”

“Perhaps, during the course of their conversation, something happened to convince him that leaving Evans alive would put him personally at too much risk. In any case, no one else went into the room,” Anne said.

“Could the corpse already have been there when he entered?”

“It is not inconceivable… . But that would mean the culprit left without locking the door, as Robert opened it at once, entering without even waiting for a reply to his knock. I shall investigate whether anyone left the room before he appeared, but since all those present were intent on the cock-fight, it is quite possible that no one noticed… . Robert goes in, to find Evans there, dead; in shock, and fearing that he will become a suspect, he locks the door and escapes through the window… .”

“Where, I wonder, did he obtain the fabric he made use of to escape? He cannot have prepared it in advance, surely.”

“I forgot to look into that.”

“Call an off-duty officer and send him to the Tom Queen to examine the rope. You and I have other business.”

Sir John and Anne’s carriage raced towards Osborne’s premises.

Hume was already there when they arrived. “It is indeed Guy Evans,” he said with some excitement. “He was in such a bad state that I could not tell at once, but I nerved myself to examine him closely. There is no mistake. What is this about? Who did this?”

“My apologies for summoning you like this,” said Anne. “And thank you for your trouble. But there is no need to stay any longer now.”

“Am I not to hear the details of this matter?”

“All will be explained eventually,” said Anne. “We still have much to investigate. For the time being, please do not speak of it to anyone else.”

Once a clearly dissatisfied Hume had been sent away, Osborne showed Sir John and Anne into his examining room.

"So this is Guy Evans," Sir John said, touching the dead man's face. It was beginning to lose its warmth, but the skin had yet to take on that eerie, penetrating chill.

Someone was holding a candle nearby. Sir John sensed the heat of its flame.

"The cause of death was strangulation," declared Osborne. "That much is unmistakable." Sir John's hand arrived at the neck. "A cravat was pulled tight around the subject's neck," he added, confirming Anne's earlier report.

"Are there any signs of resistance?"

"No. I suspect that he was not conscious when the crime was committed. Opium had been added to the wine that arrived with the coffin."

"Is it usual for people to have opium on their person, I wonder?"

"Since relief from pain is one of its effects, a person suffering from certain medical conditions might carry laudanum with him. Toothache, or stomach pain."

"Might a doctor carry something like laudanum even if he himself had no such condition? Do you, Dr. Osborne?"

"When attending a patient, I always take some with me, but when out on private business… No, I suppose I leave it at home. I am fortunate in having no tooth decay. Now, there was no sign of poisoning on the corpse. The remaining grapes were also untainted. In fact, I ate one or two of them —they were far from fresh, let me tell you!"

"Are you able to give a precise estimate of the time of death?"

"Not a precise one," Osborne replied. "Rigor mortis has yet to affect the entire body, so it has been less than half a day. That is as much I can say."

Anne had not checked the time when Robert went into the room. When she decided to open the door, it had been thirteen minutes past seven by her watch. Her sense was that about an hour had passed, but she had not measured it exactly. Several more minutes had then passed before they had ordered the publican to unlock the door.

"Before six o'clock in the evening, or after—which do you suppose it was?"

"It is difficult to say," said Osborne. He was clearly somewhat vexed.

Still, Sir John preferred his stubborn caution to a putative answer offered only to protect professional pride.

Sir John had known Osborne for many years. He had been physician to the Fielding family since before Sir John lost his sight. Although trained in surgery too, his speciality was internal medicine. Osborne had also attended Sir John's wife before her death. He had always had this manner of speaking. Sir John remembered the doctor with a shock of black hair, but, according to Anne, he now looked old, his white hair so thin that his scalp showed through it.

"The cause of death was strangulation. The time of death is unknown. Does that summarize your findings accurately?"

"It does."

"Could more light be shed on the time of death if the body were dissected?"

"Probe as much as you like, the time of death will not be revealed. The cause of death is readily apparent, making dissection unnecessary," said Osborne. "Sir John, surely there is no need for you to involve yourself so directly every time a murder is committed. Cause of death, time of death—you might leave the investigation of such matters to those you employ, and concentrate on judging the case as a whole once the evidence is assembled. Attending the autopsy each time a corpse is discovered will leave you exhausted."

"Your advice is noted with thanks," said Sir John. "This case, however, differs somewhat from a killing in the course of a robbery or a brawl. Now, please have your staff return the corpse to its coffin and load it onto the carriage waiting by your gate. And be so good as to get us one more carriage."

The vehicle with Anne and the magistrate on board led the way to Covent Garden. The one bearing the coffin followed closely behind.

Sir John ran his hands over the cravat he had removed from the neck of the deceased. The silk was smooth to the touch, but creases remained where it had been tied firmly. One part of it was stiffer than the rest.

"A bloodstain," said Anne, noticing where his fingers were. "It seems that the deceased bled from his nose onto it. Or perhaps the murderer was himself injured."

"With no signs of a struggle, I doubt the murderer was injured. Anne,

pray wrap this cravat around my neck."

"It was very recently around the neck of a murder victim, Sir John."

"I know it."

With the cravat in place, the magistrate toyed with the two ends.

He then untied it, spread it on his lap, and stroked it carefully.

Several Bow Street Runners stood guard at the entrance to Robert Barton's residence in Leicester Square. "Dr. Barton is not inside, sir," reported one. "He has yet to show himself."

"Send some men to his wife's family home in Marlow. He claimed to have stayed there from the third of July to the seventh, but he must have returned to London at least once to kill Harrington. On that day, he would have been absent. Have whoever you send investigate that point thoroughly. I shall write a note that they can show the local magistrate if anyone is arrested. He is likely to be on good terms with the family. The better sort of people in a parish like Marlow tend to stick together, so the inquiry must be discreet. They may view outsiders with suspicion. One of you come with me."

They rode on in the carriages as far as the entrance to Daniel Barton's house in Castle Street. Leaving the officer he had brought with him to guard the coffin, Sir John disembarked and announced their arrival.

"Welcome, Sir John," he heard the Professor say, and offered his hand.

Anne laughed quietly.

"What is it?"

"May I tell him, Professor?"

"Eh?" said Barton. "Tell him what?"

"Mr. Barton appears to have been at dinner. His napkin is still tucked into his shirt, and is stained with gravy. Forgive me, Professor, but as Sir John's eyes, it is my duty to report what I see. Mr. Barton is now hurriedly removing his napkin and wiping the corners of his mouth."

"I understand that Evans is dead?" said Barton.

"You know already?"

"From Mr. Hume. He called earlier and is here still."

"The gentleman is in fact just joining us," observed Anne.

"I heard his footsteps," said Sir John.

"I know I was told not to mention it," Hume said awkwardly, "but as Mr. Barton is a party to the case, I thought there was no harm in it."

“We shall overlook the indiscretion. But, pray, leave us now to speak alone together.”

“As you wish. I was on the point of going. Good day.”

“Anne, have the officer and driver unload the coffin. Professor Barton, I wish to deliver a coffin to that room of yours with the corpse-productive fireplace.”

“Is Evans in it? Are we to perform the autopsy?” asked Barton eagerly. “When and where did Evans die? Who killed him?”

“I can tell you *where*. As to *when*, that is what I wish you to discover. *Who* is a question that your findings may help to answer.”

Anne led Sir John into the house.

“I imagine it will take some time. You must finish eating first.”

“I was all but finished in any case. Am I to understand that a complete dissection of the cadaver is permitted?”

“If more precise information can be obtained thereby, I shall permit it—even request it.”

“Toby,” called Barton to his doorkeeper. “Go and summon the students.”

The coffin was carried into Barton’s private dissection room and the cadaver removed and laid face-up on a dissecting table. The empty coffin was then returned to the carriage outside.

“This is Guy Evans?” asked Barton.

Anne described how the Professor was examining the body with a lit candelabra in one hand.

“Miss Moore,” he told her, “you are certainly worthy of your position as a Bow Street Runner and Sir John’s assistant.” There was no sarcasm in his voice; his admiration seemed quite sincere. “Most young women would faint at the first sight of a victim of strangulation.”

“Compared to the condition Mr. Harrington’s face was in, this is rather less alarming,” she replied.

“Nelly,” he called, “tell Nigel to bring his pencils.”

“Yes, sir,” came Nelly’s voice from the kitchen.

Presently they heard Nigel descending the stairs. The magistrate’s curiosity was immediately aroused.

“Anne, how did she contact him? I did not hear her tread upon the stairs. Is some manner of bell-pull installed?”

“There is a rear staircase,” explained Barton. “It leads to the roof, but there is a landing on the second floor. Little more than a steep ladder—only Nelly really uses it.”

The smell of alcohol filled the room.

Even Sir John, with his blocked nose, noticed it.

“Have you been drinking?” asked Barton.

“I was robbed of the chance to,” said Nigel. “Reaching for a bottle on the shelf, I knocked it off. The bottle broke and my clothes enjoyed the wine in my place.”

“Mr. Hart’s shirt, breeches, and stockings are all soaked with wine,” confirmed Anne. “His hair, also. As if he had washed in it.”

“Is there a shelf that high in your room?” asked Barton dubiously. “Was it on top of the closet, perhaps?… No, a bottle would not fit beneath the ceiling.”

Nigel stammered. “Edward lost his temper,” he said finally in a small voice. “His fever will not go down, and it makes him irritable. I was about to drink some wine alone, which upset him. He snatched it away and poured it over me, then broke the bottle… . It is all due to his illness. He does not usually treat me like this… . Good evening, Sir John, and my apologies for the belated greeting.”

The magistrate remained seated but extended a hand. “His condition has not improved, then,” he said.

“The wound itself is not bad, but there is still some suppuration.”

“I must keep this room cleaner,” muttered Barton, admonishing himself. “Nigel, please begin drawing. This is the infamous Guy Evans. We shall open him once Al and the others arrive. Begin with a detailed illustration of his external appearance.”

“Mr. Hart,” said Sir John. “Is the cause of death apparent to you?”

“Without dissecting the cadaver, I cannot say with certainty, but its appearance suggests suffocation. The eyes are bulging, the tongue is visible. The congestion of blood in the face is unmistakable, with petechiae on the epidermis, palpebrae, conjunctiva, and oral mucosa. Traces of blood can be seen around the nostrils, suggesting a nosebleed. Someone may have wiped the rest off.”

“Ah, that would be Dr. Osborne—” began Anne, before falling silent at the magistrate’s raised finger.

“No ligature furrows or marks except a pale band around the neck. It runs more or less horizontally, indicating that something wide and soft was wrapped there. Dissection will confirm this, but the thyroid cartilage feels broken. All in all, it appears to be death by strangulation. Unlike hanging, strangulation is exceedingly difficult to effect on one’s own person. Eight or nine times out of ten, it means murder. If the victim struggled, scrapings of the assailant’s skin may be found under the fingernails, but this cadaver has no traces of it. From this we may surmise that the victim was unconscious before being killed. However, there are no signs of blunt trauma, and volatile ether is usually impractical for the uncooperative; a weak victim can be forced to inhale it, but this seems unlikely with a full-grown man like this. Accordingly, I imagine he was given laudanum or some such in his drink.”

“Brilliant,” said the magistrate, applauding briefly.

“My pupils are exceptional,” said Barton.

“Mr. Hart, shy and retiring as you may seem, you are quite eloquent on your own. The equal in brain-power of your friend Turner, I should say.”

“Oh, no,” said Nigel, his usual diffidence returning in his voice.

“I would test your powers of observation and deduction further, if I may. Pray examine this.” He offered him the cravat.

“There is blood on it.”

“From a nosebleed, apparently. This was the murder weapon.”

“That would explain the strong transverse creasing, then.”

“It would. Do you notice anything else?”

“Nothing in particular… .”

“I noticed it by feel alone,” said Sir John. “You are sighted; it will surely come to you.”

“There are other creases beside the transverse ones. As if the cravat had been crumpled in a fist. They are concentrated in an area of roughly ten inches at one end of the cravat, and three at the other end. Perhaps they were made when the cravat was gripped to perform the crime… . But no, that cannot be. If that were the case, the extent of the creasing at both ends would be identical.”

After a pause, he went on.

“I believe that this end was tied to something… . The arm of a chair, perhaps, or a table leg. The creases were made by the knot. Having

anchored one end, the murderer gripped the other and wrapped it around the neck of the victim, pulling it as tight as he could."

The magistrate nodded deeply. "I came to the same conclusion," he said. "I would hire you as another assistant if I could. Anne, do not take offence. Your position is secure."

"When I found the body," said Anne, "the end of the cravat was not tied to anything."

"The killer would have untied it before escaping."

"Why should he bother?"

"Mr. Hart, your opinion?"

"Let me think." After a moment's consideration, he quietly spoke again. "It may be that leaving the cravat tied to the chair—or whatever it was—would have pointed to the killer's identity. Someone of little strength… a woman, perhaps, or—"

Anne gasped. "Robert Barton's right hand was injured," she recalled.

"Robert!?" cried Barton. "Surely my brother would not—Evans, too!? Of course he might *wish* the man dead, but…"

"His hand was injured? That was not in your report."

"I forgot to include it, thinking it of little importance." She explained about Robert's injury on the staircase at the Tom Queen. "If he were unable to use the full strength of his right hand…"

"Sir John." Barton broke in again, sounding despondent. "Do *you* think it was my brother?… But… it is not inconceivable… . If he really did kill two others at Evans's request in exchange for forgiveness of his debt… and Evans then refused to keep to the bargain, and retained the IOU…"

Sir John heard a wheezy puff of breath from him.

"Dr. Barton was summoned to the magistrate's office and questioned on several matters," Anne said. "My assistant and I followed him afterwards. He first went to a coffee-house called Jonathan's, where he wrote a note and dispatched it to Evans by messenger boy. Acting on the instructions in Evans's reply, he then proceeded to the Tom Queen—an inn—and entered a room on the second floor. Abbott and I waited outside the door, but when Dr. Barton did not emerge after an hour, we forced our way in to find no one inside but the deceased Evans. Circumstances indicated that the murderer had escaped through the window."

"However, it is possible that Evans was already dead when Robert went

into the room," said Sir John. "This is why, as I mentioned earlier, I wish to know the exact time of death."

"A precisely observed record of the changes in the body after death does not yet exist," said Barton. "The climate, the place it occurred—many things affect developments. Which is why we need more—"

Sir John forestalled Barton's customary appeal with a raised hand. "The extent of current knowledge will suffice," he said.

"Mr. Barton is now feeling the cadaver from head to toe."

"Miss Moore, how rigid was the corpse when you discovered it?" asked Barton. "The lower jaw in particular."

"I cannot say, as the cravat was wrapped around his neck. I thought it wiser not to remove it before the autopsy… ."

"A shame. Rigidity becomes quite noticeable in the jaw after two hours or so."

"Two hours or so," Sir John reflected. "In other words, if Evans had been dead some time before Dr. Barton entered the room, a rigid jaw might have revealed that at once. A missed opportunity."

Anne did not reply. Her mood had probably taken a turn for the worse.

If Evans had died two hours before the discovery of his corpse, Sir John realized, he would not have received Robert's initial message at all.

"Mr. Barton has gestured at Nigel Hart to begin examining the cadaver," Anne reported.

"Rigidity has spread as far as the upper limbs," Nigel said. "I estimate a time of death between three and five hours ago. The rest of the body is still pli—"

He trailed off suddenly.

"Nigel!"

"Mr. Hart!"

"My apologies. A bout of slight dizziness."

"We need your drawings of the dissection. Perhaps you should rest upstairs for a time?"

"By your leave, I shall."

"Can you climb the stairs unaided?"

"Yes, thank you."

Sir John heard his footsteps disappearing upstairs.

"Such a pity that his constitution does not match his ability," Barton

declared.

"Three to five hours since death. That range is too wide."

"Then too wide it must be. I myself cannot propose a narrower one."

Just then, the other three pupils tramped in, raising the level of energy in the room.

"What is this about, then?" asked Clarence, speaking for the other two as the loudest. "'Professor's orders, everybody in,' was all old Bent-nose would tell us. Good job I had finished my supper. Sir John, from your presence I deduce that it is a criminal matter."

Al was peering at the dead body. "Strangulation, was it?"

"You know at a glance?"

"External appearances clearly indicate as much. The body must be checked for other injuries, of course."

"Mr. Hart impressed me with his perception, but I see that you, Mr. Wood, have similar gifts."

"Your hearing is a far greater marvel, Sir John," he replied. "We have barely exchanged more than a handful of words, yet you recognize my voice already."

"I know all your voices by now."

"So, who is the deceased?"

"Guy Evans," said Barton. Sir John heard in-drawn breaths.

"And the murderer?"

"Still under investigation."

"Prepare for dissection," Barton told them.

There was the clink of metal on metal as tools were being laid out. Someone was humming along with the sound. Clarence. Then he began to sing.

A was an Artery filled with injection;
B was a Beldam of awful complexion.

Ben took up a part as well. His voice was good; with some instruction, he might have sung professionally.

C was some Cartilage, that apple of Adam's;
D was the Diaphragm, prone to its spasms.
Lol de rol…

"The 'Dissection Song,'" said Barton apologetically. "Jointly composed by my pupils. They sing when they drink."

Today it seemed the three pupils were under the influence of Evans's demise.

"They have got as far as *Y*, I believe." Barton chuckled. "*Z* still has them stumped."

"The dog is restless," said Anne.

"That is just his way," said Clarence. "Nothing to worry about." The singing continued.

G was for Gaiety, all free to share it;
H was a Headache from far too much claret.

Even the usually reserved Al joined in the chorus. Belying his ordinary speaking voice, his singing was painfully off-key, which he seemed to realize.

M was a Muscle—cold, flabby, and red;
And *N* was a Nerve, like a bit of white thread.

"Ready!" declared Clarence, now slightly overexcited.

"Wait," said Barton. "Nigel has not returned yet. Clarence, go and inquire. He had a dizzy spell earlier."

"Yes, sir," said Clarence. He went up the stairs singing: "*O* was some Opium, a fool chose to take it; *P* was Profane, like our pet and his bucket. Lol de rol…" His voice grew fainter and died away.

"May I make the incision?" asked Al.

"Yes, I suppose so," Barton replied. "But just the incision line. We shall not open him until Nigel comes down."

Sir John heard the clatter of someone running down the stairs. "Professor, Edward—Edward is—" said Clarence.

"Edward is what?"

"Out of his mind!" he cried.

Chapter 16

Arched pedestrian alcoves lined the sides of London Bridge in matched sets, left and right. There were eighteen pairs in all: one above each of the piles.

When Professor Barton had first come to London from Scotland, the bridge had been dense with makeshift houses and shops, but in 1758 a four-year renovation project had begun.

The stone alcoves had been made once the way was clear. Each was like a small dome sliced in half, with narrow benches against the walls inside. Vagrants frequently made homes of them, only to be chased away by night-watchmen.

He remembered a day five years ago.

The Thames had thawed, but the weather was unchanged from the depth of winter. It was barely afternoon but murkier than twilight thanks to a heavy sky. Flakes of soot whirled in the air, too, like bits of a funeral shroud.

Barton was crossing the bridge on his way to a consultation. Looking down, he saw a reckless group in a boat near one of the bridge's piles. They appeared to be students.

The gaps between the piles were narrow, creating fast currents and eddies in the river. It was dangerous to pass through by boat—even the ferrymen preferred to avoid it. Most passengers disembarked just before the bridge, walked to the next wharf, and boarded another craft.

But for some young people, it was like running the gauntlet.

The game could easily go wrong. Onlookers gathered on the riverbank and the bridge above to wager on the outcome. When a boat disappeared under the bridge, they would run to the other side. Some vessels capsized; their occupants almost drowned. Ones that passed cleanly through were greeted with cheers.

Barton leaned over the railing and watched.

A boy who looked about sixteen or seventeen was standing on the wharf. He was dressed in black, as if for a funeral. The students in the boat goaded him with some remark. The boy climbed into one of the rowing boats at the wharf, untied its rope, dipped an oar into the water, and began

to travel with the current. Tossed by the rapids, he soon disappeared under the bridge.

"Would you care to wager?" asked a fairly respectable-looking man watching the proceedings. "I think he will fail."

"Then I shall back him to succeed," replied Barton obstinately.

They moved to the other side and leaned over.

The prow came into view first. The little boat got caught in an eddy and very nearly went bow-first underwater, but managed to right itself in time. Then it veered towards a pile, only escaping disaster when the boy pushed it away with an oar, though so much water spilled on board that they were barely afloat when they arrived at a wharf downriver.

Barton pocketed a coin from his reluctant betting partner.

A dingy rain was falling when, after diagnosing and treating the patient, he returned to the bridge. He ducked into an alcove for shelter, but got his breeches wet when he sat down on the bench.

Someone was lying on a bench in the alcove opposite. It was the boy who had passed under the bridge earlier.

Holding his bag over his head, he ran across the bridge to the other alcove. The boy's clothes were wet through, and he seemed feverish. Barton took him home with him by carriage.

When they ate together for the first time after the boy recovered, Barton placed a coin on the table. "You won me this shilling," he said. "It was the first wager I ever won in my life."

His guest explained that he had just buried his mother, and that he had been chased out of their former home for not paying the rent. Charlie laid his muzzle on the boy's leg as he talked.

And that was how Edward Turner moved in with Daniel Barton to become his first apprentice.

"I killed Evans," said Edward, sitting up in his bed.

Barton, looking shaken, told him not to be ridiculous.

The room was filled with the smell of wine, coming from a puddle on the floor with a broken bottle at its centre. Nigel crouched to pick up the bits of glass. Barton watched anxiously, hoping that his pupil would not cut his fingers.

As Al, Clarence, and Ben had been told to stay downstairs, the only other people there were Anne and Sir John.

“I killed Evans,” repeated Edward, determination in his voice.

“Where and how did you do so?” asked the magistrate sternly.

“Sir John, he is feverish and babbling.”

“I used his cravat to strangle him,” said Edward. “My wound weakened me, so I tied one end to a chair, wrapped the cravat around his neck, and pulled the other end tight.”

“Edward, you heard that from Nigel,” said Barton with an unconvincing laugh. “Nigel deduced it all from examining the cadaver before he came upstairs. You told him afterwards, did you, Nigel? Sir John, pay him no heed. He has been here in bed since his injury. His fever has made him muddled, mixing dreams with reality. This is quite common in such cases.”

“It happened at an inn called the Tom Queen,” Edward went on.

Barton saw from Anne and Sir John’s faces that he had the right location.

No doubt foreseeing a long conversation, Anne moved a chair to Edward’s bedside and helped the blind man sit down.

“How did you know Evans was in the Tom Queen?” Sir John asked, taking Edward’s hand between his own.

Edward pulled it back. “I do not like to be touched by strangers.”

“You have no right to refuse, Mr. Turner,” Anne told him. “Sir John holds people’s hands because he cannot see them.”

“But that is to help him detect an offender, is it not? I am confessing to the crime myself.”

“Your confession may be a lie,” said Anne.

“What reason have I to lie?”

She paused. “To protect someone, perhaps,” she said finally.

“Who?”

“Mr. Turner, answer me this, if you would,” said Sir John. “How did you know that Evans was in the Tom Queen? Were you and he in communication?”

“That question I cannot answer.”

“Why?”

“I cannot answer.”

“That casts some doubt on your credibility.”

“Your staff have been known to extract confessions by force. I am offering mine voluntarily. You should be grateful.”

“Edward, careful how you speak to the magistrate,” Barton warned him.

“I am told that your father was hanged for a crime of which he was innocent,” said Anne.

The look he gave her was hostile. “It happens to be true.”

“Is this your revenge, then? To make a mockery of the law? Disavow your confession in court and produce evidence of your innocence?”

“I killed Evans.”

“Edward, you have not even been out of bed since yesterday!”

“I am capable of walking if moved to do so. It was arduous, but not impossible, to use the rear stairs, go to the Tom Queen, lace the wine with laudanum, then kill him and return.”

“Nigel, is this possible? Did Edward leave the house last night? Did you know?”

“I remained in the room so that you should not notice his absence.”

“You allowed him to go? Knowing what he might do?”

“Yes. I am an accessory.”

“No, you are not,” Edward interrupted. “I never told you of my aims. I said only that I was going out.”

“Why should you shoulder all the blame?”

“That is not for you to decide.”

“I shall ask once more,” said Sir John. “Mr. Turner, how was it you came to learn that Evans was in the Tom Queen?”

“I cannot say.”

“What actions did you take there?”

“It was not difficult. This house is much closer to Charing Cross than Evans’s is, so I arrived at the inn first. I went into the room, put laudanum in the bottle of wine, and hid behind the sofa. Soon Evans entered. After he drank the wine and fell asleep, I strangled him, and came home.”

“Did Evans partake of anything other than wine?”

“No.”

“I noticed neither your departure nor your return,” said Barton.

“The rear stairs allow one to exit and enter this house through the kitchen, without being noticed,” said Nigel.

“I suppose Nelly knew about your coming and going in secret.”

“No, Nelly knows nothing of this. She must have been in the laundry-room.”

“Why did you murder Evans?” asked Sir John doggedly.

“Because he is the root of all evil.”

“Evil or not, punishment must be left in the hands of the law.”

Edward’s laugh was chilly and thin. “O the dignity and equity of the law! Are the rich punished for sleeping under bridges, begging in the streets, and stealing bread? Miss Moore, you are the record-keeper, I believe. Have you recorded my confession?”

“Yes.”

“Pray read it back to me. If it is without error, I shall sign it.”

“I am not finished,” said Sir John. “Why confess now? You were not yet under any suspicion. There was no provocation. Why?”

“If I told you that my conscience was weighing on me, would that satisfy you?”

“I am afraid not.”

“The prospect of maintaining the deception was becoming loathsome,” he said. “To live the rest of my life parrying your inquiries would have been exhausting.”

“I think not. If you were the culprit, the challenge of outwitting me would surely appeal to you.”

“I do not have the energy for that. I am tired. I have confessed—is that not enough?”

“Without evidence, we cannot take you to trial.”

“Very well, then. Find your evidence. That is your concern, not mine.”

“Sir John, I beg you,” said Barton. “Allow him time to recover He is very weak. If only you could see his colour, I am sure you would agree that his alleged fatigue is no exaggeration.”

“Do you believe that he has told us the truth, Mr. Barton? That his fatigue comes from having committed murder?”

“No, I believe no such thing. Edward is unwell, which is the cause of his exhaustion.”

“He is at least alive enough to be offensive,” said Sir John. “Wait. Anne, how many people are in this room?”

“Five. Turner in his sickbed, Hart and Mr. Barton beside him, then you and me.”

“Is that all?”

As the magistrate spoke, they heard the sound of feet on the stairs,

followed by a knock on the door.

Then Clarence's voice. "May we come in?"

"What do you say?" Sir John asked Edward. "This is your room. To admit them or not is your decision."

"You may do as you see fit, m'lord."

"You are not to show disrespect to Sir John," warned Anne, to little effect.

"Come in," called Sir John. The door opened and the other three pupils appeared.

"We simply could not sit about waiting any longer," said Clarence. "Is Edward still claiming to be the culprit?"

"This place smells like a winery," said Ben, looking at the stain spreading across the floor. "The aftermath of a fit of hysterics, I gather."

Barton's eyes went suddenly wide. "Did you all leave Charlie alone with the cadaver?"

"Damn!" said Clarence. "Ben, go downstairs and keep an eye on him!"

A *Why me?* was clear on Ben's face, but he did as he was told. His footsteps receded down the stairs—then grew louder again. "Too late," he said, reappearing at the door. "A bit is missing."

"You opened the cadaver?" said Barton. "I told you to wait until Nigel was ready to draw."

"After we made the incision, we… er… we found ourselves with nothing better to do… ."

"How bad is the damage?" demanded Anne.

"Not serious. A nibble or two. I chased him into the kitchen. Nelly is watching him now."

"The dog is a pagan," said Sir John. "He is fortunate that we are no longer in the Middle Ages. Now, Mr. Turner: you have confessed to murder. I must restrict your movements until the trial. I shall not send you straight to Newgate, but keep you in our holding cell. If, after thorough investigation, evidence that you were the culprit emerges, you shall be tried at the Old Bailey."

"Sir John, please. His injury is sure to worsen if he is imprisoned in this condition. Allow him to stay here until he heals at least. There is no danger of his absconding."

After a moment's thought, the magistrate agreed. "Very well. We shall

leave him here. Some of my constables will remain outside his door to keep his movements under watch. A strict watch. As for Nigel Hart, he will come to the holding cell in Turner's place. I trust you have no objections, Mr. Hart. You have, after all, admitted to being an accessory to murder."

"Nigel had nothing to do with it!" cried Edward. "It was all me!"

"I understand. You have incriminated yourself. You will be investigated thoroughly as soon as you regain your health. But Mr. Hart, who knew about the deed but did nothing to prevent it, must be included in the case."

"I have told you already. Nigel knew nothing of what I intended to do when I left."

"We shall look into that matter ourselves."

Chapter 17

It was already past ten o'clock when Sir John arrived home.

"You must rest, Uncle John," said Anne, forgetting her official duties for a moment to speak as a niece. "You have a busy day in court tomorrow."

"No information about Robert Barton, I suppose?"

"He has made no appearance at either his home or Evans's."

"Is Abbott simply standing by the house keeping watch? Robert will stay away if the surveillance is too obvious. I hope that Abbott has taken this into consideration."

"I am sure he has."

"Send some people to relieve him. We may have to call back a few who have gone home for the day. How short of staff we are!"

If only the government would support them financially, they could build up a much stronger organization. *We need more funding*, he told himself, then smiled ruefully at the thought of Barton and his incessant demands for more cadavers.

Anne left the room to give the necessary orders. When she returned, he asked her what she made of Edward Turner's confession.

"Instead of sharing my thoughts," she said, "I should rather hear yours."

"Was it the truth, or was he lying to protect someone else? Let us start from the assumption that it was true. In that case, we must ask how Turner knew that Evans was at the Tom Queen. He refused to answer on this point. Another question is why, at this stage, he should step forward and confess."

"Perhaps he had been watching Evans's movements… . But he was injured. I doubt he could have done it very ably."

"His injury bothers me, too. The nature of the wound suggests that it was a trick intended to place him above suspicion, but it became more serious than initially planned when it festered. That much seems plausible. Did Turner engage some other party to assault him? If so, we must find the person. No reports have returned from the team searching for him, have they?"

"Not yet. You say 'above suspicion'— do you think he was already planning to murder Evans at that time?"

"If so, surely he would maintain the deception. To confess would be bizarre—inconsistent."

“If the confession was a false one, who was it meant to protect?”

“Who is the most important person to him?”

“Professor Barton, I suppose.”

“I agree. Evans’s death would have freed Robert Barton from debt, removing the threat to the anatomy school and saving the preparations. The Professor certainly had a reason to want Evans out of the way—yet I cannot imagine him permitting Turner to commit the crime for him. Still, I have lost some confidence in my intuition. My ability to distinguish sincerity from falsehood has become erratic. My sense of smell is somewhat diminished also, although this is only due to a cold.”

“You have a cold? You should go to bed.”

“You are a master of tone, my dear—you go from brisk officer to charming niece and back again quite smoothly. Now, Turner and Hart—their room reeked of wine.”

“Yes. There was a broken bottle.”

“I found that smell quite interesting.”

“In what way?”

“You noticed nothing?”

“My sense of smell is not as acute as yours.”

“How might Turner have known that Evans was at the Tom Queen? Since his own movements were constrained, perhaps he had someone else spy on Evans for him.”

“One of his fellow pupils working in concert with him? Or perhaps they are all in on this. For the Professor’s sake.”

“If every one of them were lying, and I could not hear it in any of their voices, I should have to resign my commission. No, let us restrict ourselves to one individual. Who do you think the likeliest conspirator?”

“Albert Wood?” said Anne after a brief pause. “Neither Benjamin Beamis nor Clarence Spooner seem reliable enough.”

“I agree. Wood is made of sterner stuff.”

“Of course, if it were him, one suspects he would have strongly advised against any killing if Turner brought the idea to him.”

“You said there were five people in Turner’s room, did you not?”

“Yes.”

“There were no women there besides you.”

“Certainly not.”

“It seemed to me that one more person was present,” said Sir John. “I cannot be certain with my nose as it is, but I believe I detected the faint smell of cosmetics. I know that you do not wear much, Anne, and this was not your scent in any case. Some other woman, with different tastes, was in that room. If she was not there when we were, she must have departed before we arrived, leaving only her fragrance behind. Her cosmetics must have been quite heavily applied for the scent to linger so long. Perhaps this was the person Turner had follow Evans’s movements, and when she saw her quarry enter the Tom Queen, she hurried back to report the fact. As for who it might have been, only Nelly comes to mind, but that was not her smell either.”

“Nelly wears no cosmetics.”

“Did the woman wait in Turner’s room while he went to the pub? No, that makes no sense. She would have no reason to dally there once her message was conveyed.”

“Unless she was waiting in the bed, in Turner’s stead,” said Anne. “She could have turned her face from the door and made sure the blanket covered everything but her head. That way, if Mr. Barton happened to come in, Hart could simply point at her and whisper that he was asleep. The Professor would surely accept this without going any closer.”

“The hair would have to the same colour as Turner’s,” said Sir John. “What colour is that?”

“A light blonde.”

“A woman with light blonde hair… . Has anyone fitting that description been seen around him?”

“Not that I know of.”

“We know little of his private life. There may be some woman in it who was willing to assist him.”

“He is, indeed, the kind of man whom women tend to be fond of.”

“Did she leave the room before we arrived?” said Sir John. “Or was she hiding somewhere inside, having missed her chance to escape? In either event, the wine bottle was certainly broken intentionally, to obscure the smell of her. A clumsy ploy—a bottle of perfume would have been a better choice.”

“That would have required an explanation for a bottle of perfume in a room shared by two men, however.”

“Among the nobility, even men paint themselves. Periwig, powder, and rouge are *de rigueur* in such circles. I avoid them myself, mind you. Protocol does force me to wear a wig at times, but it is the most irritating thing you can imagine.”

The magistrate removed his heavy, tight-curled wig and scratched his balding pate.

“Let me try to remember the details of Turner’s room,” said Anne. “One moment… There *was* a tall wardrobe in there. A woman might have been hiding inside it.”

Sir John was forced to replace his wig by the arrival of a messenger. A report had come in from an officer sent to the Tom Queen.

Anne scanned it quickly. “The length of fabric that we believe Robert used to escape from the inn was the same stuff as the skirting around the bed. The bed skirt in the neighbouring room had been torn off.”

“He took it from the other room…? Peculiar. Why not simply use what he had in his own? Anne, think back to that scene. Is there anything we have overlooked? Or, I should say, looked square in the face but failed to notice?”

The magistrate waited.

“There is one thing I left out,” she said. “At the end that was tied to the chair, the part protruding from the knot had been turned into another knot. Someone had tied and retied it into a ball. I did not mention it because I assumed that it was done to prevent the cord coming loose from the chair, or perhaps to ensure that it caught on something if it began to unravel.”

“We still have the fabric, I believe.”

“Yes. An officer brought it back. It is with Evans’s clothing and effects.”

“Pray bring it to me.”

When Anne returned with the fabric, Abbott was with her. She explained that he had come to make his report, up until the arrival of his relief.

The fabric was a sturdy figured textile, thick and heavy. Sir John examined the size and weight of the knotted ball at one end as Abbott spoke.

He was brief. “There was no sign of Robert Barton during my watch of Evans’s home,” he said.

“Thank you. You deserve some rest… . But instead I must ask you to accompany me to the Tom Queen.”

“Tonight?” said Anne. “Surely it can wait until tomorrow, Uncle John.”

“We are magistrate and assistant at present, Anne. Please refrain from using your niece-voice.”

“The pub is closed,” she said. “It is normally open until near dawn, but we had the owner close early today, in view of recent events, and remain closed for two or three more days. Our constables have returned from the scene, so I imagine the owner has gone to bed.”

“Then we shall wake him up. Does he live in the building?”

“Yes. I believe his rooms are on the third floor.”

A servant entered and reported the arrival of several visitors. “They claim to be pupils of Mr. Daniel Barton. Their names are Albert Wood, Clarence Spooner, and Benjamin Beamis.”

“Show them in.”

By now, the blind judge could tell the three apart by their footsteps.

Clarence began apologetically. “It is about the damage we allowed to be done to the cadaver. There is not much to report, but we all came together since Covent Garden can be dangerous at night. We have determined that the dog only ate part of the lower stomach.”

“What remained of the stomach was almost empty,” continued Ben. “We gave Charlie a purgative and had him excrete what he had eaten. Canine waste is not usually part of our work, but we felt responsible… .”

“On examination, we discovered three undigested seeds—these,” said Al, handing over a packet wrapped in paper. “They are grape seeds. After being thoroughly washed.”

Sir John opened the packet and checked its contents with his fingers, then asked Anne for her opinion.

“They do indeed appear to be grape seeds.”

“Charlie is not fed grapes,” said Clarence. “We seldom have them ourselves—like most imported goods, they are expensive. Al, though, was able to confirm their identity.”

“We can be certain that these were in Evans’s stomach,” Al said. “If they did not have time to pass into the intestines, then he must have died not long after swallowing them. Is this information of use to you?”

“It may well be important. Thank you,” said Sir John, offering Al his

hand. The young man's hand was as bony as his nickname suggested.

He shook hands with the others as well. Ben's was plump and soft, but with calluses on his fingers. He explained why. "My father's a tailor, and I help sometimes. Stitching tough fabric is quite an effort."

"I do enjoy our conversations," said Sir John. "However, let us settle this matter first. Mr. Wood, I have a request to make of you. Please stay behind. Your colleagues may leave, but be careful going home."

"A request?" asked Al, sounding nervous.

"May we visit Nigel before we go?" said Clarence.

"The holding cell is in this building, is it not?" Ben inquired.

Abbott had not been informed of the arrest, and was shocked.

"It happened while you were watching Evans's house," said Anne. "I shall explain later." Nigel was being well treated, she added, and told Clarence and Ben to go home.

"Edward would never have said those things if he were not sick. Nigel was only following his lead."

"When will you let him out, Sir John?"

"Is he sharing the cell with those grave-robbers?" Abbott asked.

"Abbott," said the magistrate sharply, his voice silencing the growing din. "Get me a sedan chair."

The two persisted to the last, repeatedly asking where and why Nigel was being held.

"You may visit him another day," said Sir John finally, before taking his leave.

Chapter 18

A constable came thundering down the stairs.

"Mr. Barton!" he cried. "Order Turner to open his door, if you please."

"What is the matter?"

"I heard a sound inside the room, but when I tried to go in, the door wouldn't open."

"You locked the door yourselves. And kept the key!"

"The keyhole'd been stuffed shut so as we couldn't see through or put the key in. We did poke out whatever it was and get the door unlocked, but something heavy's also been shoved in the way to stop it opening. By what I can see through the keyhole, I'd say it's a bed."

Barton hurried, bow-legged, upstairs.

The other constable was rapping on the door, shouting "Open up!" Barton pushed him aside and pressed his eye to the keyhole. The field of view was limited. The room had two beds that were usually side by side, but the one that should have been closest to the door—Nigel's—could not be seen. Presumably this was because it had been moved right against the door.

"Edward, it's me," Barton said. "What happened?"

"Nothing," came his voice.

"Open the door."

"Impossible. I cannot move it again. I am quite exhausted."

"Why did you move it in the first place?"

"I did not like them coming and going as they pleased."

"You're in confinement!" exploded the officer. "*We* will determine who comes and who goes, and when!"

"When I recover my strength, I shall remove it," said Edward, panting slightly. "Do not be concerned, Professor."

"He is temperamental," Barton told the constables. "Being under surveillance in his own room must be very unpleasant for him. Please let him be."

"But we heard a noise."

"I tripped trying to push the bed," called Edward. "Something fell from a shelf."

"Your wound did not open again?"

“All is well.”

“Rest,” ordered Barton. “Your injury will never heal if you keep pushing furniture around.”

“All right. I would be able to rest if the Runners could just be quiet.”

“There, you see?” Barton said to them. “If you keep quiet, he will too.”

“But he made a noise first.”

“Acting like prison guards is working against you.” He lowered his voice. “Edward is stubborn, and a trifle perverse. The more force you apply, the more he will resist. In any case, he lacks the strength to move the bed again now. We must wait until he recovers.”

They heard some thumping on the other side of the door, before it opened inwards a little.

“I have moved it,” called Edward.

Peering through the crack into the room, Barton saw that the corner of the bed closest to the doorknob had been dragged back a foot or so. Edward had collapsed onto the mattress, shoulders heaving from the exertion.

The guards pressed their faces into the gap, then nodded at each other and, pulling the door shut, locked it again.

“Edward, you are to rest quietly,” called Barton.

“Your pupils are an unruly lot,” said one of the guards. “Like children—even when they’re villains.”

Barton groaned and went downstairs. Sleep looked improbable. He decided to enlist the assistance of laudanum, sprinkling a few drops into a glass of claret which he drained in one gulp and placed back on the table. Fearing that it might become a habit if the drug were kept in his bedroom, he stored it in his private dissection room instead.

To think that Edward should have killed Evans… And for his teacher’s sake! Evans’s death would erase Robert’s debts, eliminate the threat looming over the school itself. This was behind Edward’s act—with Nigel aiding and abetting him.

Barton doubted that Nigel’s punishment would be severe. Edward’s, on the other hand…

He let out another groan. Charlie raised his head warily, then wagged his tail.

It suddenly occurred to Barton that he knew almost nothing of who Nigel really was. He had never concerned himself with the matter.

It had been Edward who had made the introduction, the year before last. Saying that they had become friendly after a chance encounter, he had shown the Professor one of Nigel's drawing-books. Barton had been astonished by the work it contained.

"His father was a painter. He cannot remember a time when he did not know how to use a paintbrush, and he learnt to draw under his father's strict tuition. You were looking for an artist for your dissections. Nigel has nowhere to stay—could he not use my room?"

Barton had agreed at once. The boy's identity and family circumstances interested him not a whit. His artistic talents, whether granted by God or the Devil, were all that was needed.

Fortunately, Nigel had proved a good boy.

Chapter 19

It was dark behind the magistrate's eyelids. They were travelling by lantern, he assumed.

"Abbott." Anne's voice came through the wall of his sedan chair. "I just remembered that there was something I had been meaning to talk to you about. I think you tip the children too freely."

"Ah," said Abbott. "If you mean earlier today, that was…"

"I gave the boy a tip and bought him an eel pie. That should have been more than sufficient. If you give one child too much, the others soon hear of it. Before long they will all raise their prices."

"My apologies."

"What did you say to the boy as you were tipping him, by the way?"

Sir John listened for Abbott's reply. It was some time coming.

"I said 'Thank you,'" he told her at last.

"Take care in future."

"Yes, ma'am."

As they entered the back streets behind Charing Cross, Sir John's eyelids grew lighter inside.

"There is a light in every window on the street," reported Anne.

"These are the most profitable hours for a nefarious business," said Sir John.

The sedan chair stopped.

The magistrate had paid close attention to Albert Wood's footsteps and attitude over the course of the journey, hoping to determine whether he had come here before—perhaps in pursuit of Evans—or whether the route was entirely new to him. By the time they arrived at the Tom Queen, these suspicions had more or less been abandoned. Wood was not the dissimulator Turner was.

"The pub alone is dark and silent as a graveyard, since we closed it down for the night," said Anne. "However, there is a light in a third-floor window."

"Stop that!" they heard someone cry.

Sir John recognized the voice at once.

"It's Marshal Hitchin. Seen outside the establishment," reported Anne.

“Abbott held a lantern close to his face. Hitchin hid behind his hands, but not quickly enough.”

“Sir John!” The voice was stretched tight.

“Mr. Hitchin,” said the magistrate. “I did not expect to find you here. Do I infer correctly that the libellous part of that pamphlet placed you at the Rose rather than the Tom Queen?”

“Absolutely not. Are *you* a regular patron of this establishment, m’lord?” he countered ineffectually.

The marshal must have been forced to switch from the Rose to the Tom Queen after his exposure in the pamphlet made it too risky to continue visiting the former. News of the murder committed here had clearly not travelled far yet.

“As for myself, I simply happened to be passing by,” said Hitchin. “Good night to you.”

“Should we stop him?” asked Anne.

“No. Let him go.”

Hitchin’s relief was palpable.

“Mr. Hitchin,” Sir John called out sternly. “I have a number of questions for you. Please visit my office tomorrow morning.” It would be necessary to determine whether his presence was simple coincidence or if he was somehow involved with the incident.

“Yes, m’lord. Good night, m’lord,” he said, hurrying away.

“Now, have them open their door to us,” said Sir John to his companions.

Abbott hammered on the front door with his fist.

“The window on the third floor has opened.”

“Stop pounding, damn you!” came a voice from overhead. “We are closed. Find another pub.”

“Open the door.”

“On your way, or I shall call the Bow Street Runners!”

“The Bow Street Runners,” said Sir John, “are already here.”

“Yet more fuss?” asked the voice from upstairs. “We have closed for the night, just as you ordered.” He did indeed sound like a man who might once have been a non-commissioned officer.

“There is something we must investigate.”

“Have you not investigated enough already? We have done nothing

wrong here—to punish us with closure is excessive."

"The magistrate wishes to inspect the scene himself," Anne told him.

Moments later, the door was swung open by an apologetic owner.

"Take us to the room where the man was found dead."

"But it is on the second floor."

"Sir John, the stairs here are unsafe," Anne said. "As I mentioned earlier, instead of a banister there is a rope. Grip it firmly with your right hand. Abbott will support you from the left. The rope is held in place by nails whose heads protrude a little, so be careful of those too."

The publican led the way, holding a candle high. Next came Sir John and Abbott, with the latter's arm around his waist. Anne followed behind, issuing the occasional warning when her uncle's hand came near a nail. Al brought up the rear.

"Rather slippery, this rope," observed Sir John.

"It has been held by so many hands that it is quite black. Be careful, Uncle John. Lift your feet higher."

Proceeding step by step, they finally reached the top of the perilous stairway, to everyone's relief.

"This floor is where the cock-fights are held," said Anne, taking Sir John's right arm. "There is a round cock-pit in the centre."

With Abbott holding his left arm as well, Sir John felt as if he were being taken into custody.

"The cock-pit is sunk into the floor, so take care where you step," continued Anne. "Abbott, walk a little more to the left. I fear I might slip in."

When Abbott and Anne stopped, Sir John stopped with them.

"The door to the room in question is just as we left it after Abbott kicked it down," said Anne. "Let us go inside."

Having no further use for the publican, they shooed him downstairs.

"In the middle of the room is the table. Here is the sofa. On the opposite wall is the alcove containing the bed."

Sir John felt the fabric hung around the bed, satisfying himself that it was the same as the cord he had already examined. "Tie the cord that the killer used to the chair," he said. "Arrange everything as it was when you first saw it."

Sir John was running his hands over the chair, which was pushed

against the window with the fabric hanging down the side of the building, when he heard Al doing something.

"Anne, what is Mr. Wood up to?" he asked.

"Reacting with surprise to your question," reported Anne, "but first leaning out of the window, looking down and then to the left."

"Mr. Wood, why to the left? What do you hope to see?"

Al hesitated for a moment. "If things were the other way around," he said finally, "the knot at the end of the rope would make sense."

"What do you mean?"

"I do not suppose, sir, that you ever climbed a tree as a child?"

"I may have climbed a few."

"One method is to throw a rope over a high branch, then cling to it as you scramble up. If the rope is weighted at the end, it drops over the branch more surely. The knot in the fabric could serve as that weight. The window of the room to the left of this one has a narrow balcony with low metal bars."

Sir John understood Al's point by now, but urged him to continue.

"This means that if someone were trying to escape from this window to the next, the cord would be a useful device. If it were thrown, knot-first, with enough skill, the knot would get tangled in the metal bars, and the cord could then be used to traverse the wall to the next window. It is too dark to make out very much, but to judge from the length of the fabric, even hung vertically it would end seven or eight yards from the ground. The leap would not be impossible, but a slight misjudgement could easily lead to injury. Far better to climb across to the adjacent window, holding on to the rope and finding footholds in the rough brickwork. But that was not the direction of movement, was it? And the bars on this room's window are broken, so the rope could not have been thrown here from the other one. My apologies—I have wasted your time with pointless speculation."

Calculating the correct location from the source of Al's voice, Sir John patted him on the shoulder with appreciation. "Let us visit the next room," he said. "Anne, lend me your arm. Abbott, untie the cord from the chair, but do not unravel the knotted end. You will stay here; Al, bring the cord and come with us."

"Sir John, you called me 'Al,'" he said happily. "I am much more accustomed to that than 'Mr. Wood.'"

“Then from now on that is what I shall say.”

“I have no objection to ‘Skinny,’ either.”

The next room, as Anne explained, was almost identical to the first, except that the bed and sofa were on opposite sides. The bed skirt, she noted again, was torn.

“Lead me to the window,” Sir John said.

Anne supported him on one side, Al on the other. Al had clearly been pleased by the use of his name. Would the other pupils open up to Sir John, too, if he used their Christian names?

The magistrate’s body brushed against the window frame.

“Not too far, please,” said Anne, stopping him from leaning out.

“Abbott, wait by the window!” he called. Then, in a quieter voice: “Al, do you have a good throwing arm?”

“As good as the next fellow’s, if no better.”

“Abbott, catch this! Al, throw it!”

Anne said it had successfully arrived.

“Tie it to the chair,” Sir John called. “Al, to what should we tie this end?”

“What about the bars on the window?”

“Good. Pull it tight and tie it well. Abbott! Can you use it to cross to this window?”

“That should not be difficult.”

“Shall I do it?” asked Al. “I could cross to the next room and return.”

“No, I prefer not to ask an ordinary citizen to put himself in such danger. Abbott is well trained. He will be all right.”

Abbott managed without incident.

“Untie the cord from the bars,” said Sir John. “Well, Anne?”

“Yes—it is now dangling from the other window, just as it was yesterday. In other words,” she said, growing excited, “Robert Barton did not act alone. He entered that room as we watched, but then escaped to this one, with the help of an accomplice in here. He then bided his time in this room until he saw us enter the other, and slipped out through the door.”

“So it *was* Dr. Barton!” said Al. “Edward had nothing to do with it. He was simply addled with fever.”

“He claimed to have arrived before Evans and hidden behind the sofa,” said Sir John. “However, he did not know about the grapes Evans ate.”

“Proof that he was not the murderer.”

“Al, do you know of any women with whom he enjoys close relations?”

“Edward never lacks for female attention, but he has no one in particular… as far as I know. Of course, I was not aware that Edward and Nigel had befriended the boy Nathan either, so perhaps it simply escaped my notice. He is something of a libertine, apparently.”

“Gambling, women, that sort of thing?”

“It seems that he spends many nights out on the town with Nigel. Neither of them speak of it directly, but it is apparent in what they say if one listens carefully.”

“Does Professor Barton approve of this?”

“They seem to have kept it secret from him, and I have not told him either. I dislike telltales. I only told you, Sir John, since you asked about it —I did not mean to disparage them.”

“If you learn anything about a woman close to Mr. Turner, I hope you will tell me about that too.”

Al was silent.

“What is that, Mr. Wood?” said Anne. She explained to Sir John: “He picked up a piece of paper that was by the window. Opened it, glanced at it, then put it in his pocket. Show it to us, please.”

“It is only a scrap of paper,” said Al. “However, as you wish…”

“Three inches in width, two inches in height,” said Anne. “Torn. With some letters and numbers on it.”

“Read them.”

“‘W dash 367…’ After that, it is ragged. I cannot see what comes next.”

“Al, why did you hide that piece of paper without informing us about it?”

“I meant nothing in particular by it,” he said. “Just some waste paper, which I was going to throw away later.”

“You know that I have a good ear. You are concealing something.”

“Do you know what these numbers mean, Mr. Wood?” asked Anne. “You must *not* hold anything back from us.”

“I honestly thought it was a bit of rubbish.”

“Al, I want you to produce the rest of the paper from your pocket—the part that remained when you tore it in two while reaching in to retrieve it for Miss Moore.”

This was only a hunch, but he spoke with assurance. When there was no answer, he spoke again.

"I have no wish to treat you roughly, Al. But if you were to insist on this peculiar concealment, I should have no choice but to order Abbott to search you by force."

"It tore when I was taking it out of my pocket. It was not intentional."

Sir John sensed that this was untrue, but decided not to press him further.

"He has handed me the rest of the paper," said Anne. "'53.' Then a date and signature. The date is the seventh of July, 1770—this year. The signature is hard to make out… . 'A dot O-P-P…' I can read no further, it is little more than a scrawl."

"Who is A dot O etc., Al?"

"I do not know," he insisted. It was apparent from his voice that he was lying.

They summoned the publican and asked him who had used the room.

"Who indeed? I believe it was one of our regulars, but with so many comings and goings I can hardly remember every one."

"This is important. Search your memory."

To loosen the publican's tongue, Sir John gave him ten shillings.

The man wavered.

Another ten shillings.

"Ah, yes. Now I recall. The room was taken by a man of middle years and, to judge by appearances, some breeding. We do not use real names here, however, so I cannot identify him further."

None of this, Sir John sensed, was a true recollection. He was simply making something up to earn his twenty shillings. The truth was that the publican did not remember a thing.

After sending Al home, Sir John returned to his own residence by sedan chair. Al had not been asked to keep the matter quiet, so it seemed likely that he would call on Professor Barton on his way home, to report the events of the evening.

Back in his chambers, Sir John eased himself into a chair, but he was not yet able to relax. He called Abbott in and said something that he expected would shake the man profoundly.

"I believe you used one of the messenger boys at the crossroads to send

a message to Edward Turner."

"Wha— No, not… not Mr. Turner…" He trailed off.

"Nigel Hart, then. Do I have it right?"

"Yes, sir," he admitted unhappily.

"Which solves the mystery of how Turner knew that Evans was in the Tom Queen. Did you do this at Hart's request? Did he ask you to keep him informed about the activities of Evans and Robert Barton?"

"That boy is a witch."

His voice sounded like a brush scraped across rusty metal. Sir John almost thought the reply had come from someone else.

Abbott fell silent, as if he already regretted saying as much as he had.

"You mean that you were taken in by him?"

"I thought he meant to assist us."

"Nevertheless, you felt uneasy about what you had done. Which is why, when Anne asked what you said to the boy you over-tipped, you struggled to answer."

"Yes, sir."

"I expected better of you, Abbott!" cried Anne. "Nigel Hart a witch? His drawings are bewitching, but that's all, surely?"

Sir John had never seen Abbott in person, but he believed that his mental image of him, based on the angle from which his voice came and Anne's description, was more or less accurate. Now in his mind's eye he saw this Roman gladiator of a man (Anne's imagery) standing there with lips pressed tight together and cheek twitching above his square jaw.

"Anne, go and fetch Nigel Hart. Take Abbott with you."

"It is the middle of the night. Why not question him tomorrow?"

"I would rather finish the task while in the mood to do so. First, something to drink."

He heard the tread of three people approach.

"Anne, how does Mr. Hart look?"

"We interrupted his sleep. His eyes are bloodshot, his eyelids puffy, and his overall countenance drowsy."

Sir John heard the faint sound of a stifled yawn.

To sleep soundly while locked up with grave-robbers on suspicion of being an accomplice to murder showed surprising composure on his part. Was their image of Nigel as a shy person hiding in Turner's shadow the

result of a carefully maintained masquerade? Sir John recalled the word that Abbott had used: *witch*.

"Nigel," he said, addressing him warmly.

Sir John had called Wood "Al" without any ulterior motive—but if Nigel shared his ability to distinguish truth from deceit in what he heard, what would he sense in the magistrate's voice now?

"Edward Turner is innocent," Sir John continued.

"He is?" Delight was mingled with puzzlement in Nigel's voice.

I must be careful, thought Sir John. He had viewed Edward as the skilled dissembler and Nigel as an open book, but it seemed that things were not so simple. Perhaps Nigel's clumsy lies had been part of the ruse. Sir John was starting to lose confidence in his own ability to discern the truth.

"Robert Barton arranged a meeting with Evans at the Tom Queen. Abbott employed a messenger boy to inform you and Edward Turner of that fact."

How *had* they got at the stiffly proper Abbott, who now could be heard breathing hard?

"After discussing the matter with Turner, you slipped out to the Tom Queen to spy on the two of them. To that end, you took the room next to theirs. Do I have it right so far?"

There was no reply.

"The rooms are for fornication. To rent one alone would arouse suspicion. You took a wench in with you, then paid her off so that you could listen to what transpired in the neighbouring room. Robert Barton arrived, and—whether as expected or otherwise—murdered Evans. As he was leaning out of the window searching for a means of escape, you offered him one. You tore off the bed skirt, knotted it at one end to add weight, and threw it to him from the window. The two of you hid in your room until you were able to slip out of the pub together. You then smuggled him into the room you share in Professor Barton's house, using the rear staircase."

Nigel remained silent, so Sir John went on.

"When I visited your room, there were five people in it. But I sensed a sixth."

"Someone hiding in the wardrobe, perhaps," said Anne.

"As for you, Mr. Hart, the odour of the whore's cosmetics clung to you.

You changed your clothes, but it was still in your hair, on your skin. There was no time to bathe. Knowing of my keen sense of smell—was it Turner's idea?—you contrived to mask the odour by pouring wine over your head and breaking the bottle."

"Why did you not denounce Robert Barton?" demanded Anne. "Was it lack of funds to bring suit against him?"

In France and elsewhere, the state itself could indict an offender against whom there was no one willing to take legal action. In eighteenth-century England, however, only a suit from a private citizen could launch a trial. The bill for apprehending the criminal, court fees—all were payable by the litigant. In this way, even a lesser offence could cost five to twenty pounds to litigate, with more serious crimes imposing a burden of fifty to seventy pounds. The costs involved were enough to persuade many victims to cut their losses and let the matter drop. As a result, even known criminals were not always taken to court for their misdeeds, although political figures like the Lord Mayor sometimes stepped in to cover court fees for the sake of public safety.

To eliminate the harm of known law-breakers going unpunished, a scheme had been instituted whereby if someone were found guilty, a reward was paid to the person who had brought suit against him. This system, however, was immediately abused by people concocting indictments solely for the reward money.

But Edward and Nigel surely would not spare Robert simply for financial reasons, and Sir John doubted that Anne thought so, either. Frustration must have led to that sarcastic outburst of hers.

Anne was a capable pair of eyes; it was unfortunate, he felt, that when she grew excited her voice began to sound like an ill-tuned violin.

"The two of you had agreed with Robert Barton to co-operate. Is that not the case, Mr. Hart?"

"It is." Nigel broke his silence at last, using the soft voice they were accustomed to hearing from him. Sir John reminded himself not to be fooled. Nigel had got the better of Abbott and helped a culprit escape. This was a formidable young man.

"Edward Turner volunteered that he had murdered Evans. For what reward?"

Anne broke in without waiting for the reply. "You forced him to write

some sort of contract. About the ownership of the preparations."

"Anne, let Mr. Hart speak."

"After you, Miss Moore," said Nigel.

"Tell us yourself, Mr. Hart."

"It is as you suppose. We threatened to bring charges against him if he did not accept our offer. He was hiding in the wardrobe during the exchange between Edward and Sir John."

"Robert accepted this?"

"He had little choice in the matter. We made him draw up an agreement, but he insisted on one condition: he would not sign it until Edward had publicly taken the blame. By now, I imagine, he has signed his name and left our room. Which means that he is fair game," he added with a quiet laugh.

An innocent laugh, or a sly one celebrating the success of a subtle scheme? Sir John could not tell.

"I have constables stationed outside your room," he said. "Even if Robert planned to use the rear staircase, surely he would still need to leave by the door."

"I meant through the window," said Nigel. "Dr. Barton is quite sprightly for his age."

"He proved himself a very tightrope-walker at the Tom Queen," Sir John conceded. "Nigel," he went on, deliberately using the familiar form of address. "Were you not aware that Turner might still have risked a death sentence? All to save Professor Barton's preparations? I might have sent him to the Old Bailey, you know. Even if he were to recant his earlier statement in court and plead innocent, there is no knowing whether the jury would accept that."

"We decided to trust you, sir." There was a hint of a smile in his voice. "We were sure you would arrive at the truth. And so you have, just as we hoped."

"But your illegal acts to help an offender escape still remain. You, in particular, have committed a serious crime."

"Not a capital one, though. Not even one meriting transportation to the colonies. With a skilful lawyer, I believe that I might receive a light sentence by pleading extenuating circumstances. If I face the stocks, well, I can bear that."

“Turner shoulders the blame for Evans’s murder. Very well. But Dr. Barton is also a suspect in the deaths of Nathan Cullen and Thomas Harrington. If he did kill them, he will be found guilty whether Evans forced him to do it or not.”

“But there is only circumstantial evidence—nothing definite. Even if he were brought to trial, a verdict of not guilty might be secured through his lawyer’s efforts and bribing the jury. Evans’s murder is different: I was there when he did it. He would have no hope of escaping punishment except by eliminating me, the witness, as well.”

“That,” Abbott exclaimed, “he will not be allowed to do.”

Anne hushed him, rolling her eyes.

“Even with Evans dead, the promissory notes remain,” said Sir John. “What if they are inherited by his heirs?”

“Robert will presumably visit Evans’s home to remove them.”

“Anne, show Nigel the scrap of paper we found earlier.”

Both Robert and Nigel had apparently used the room in question. Which of the two had dropped the note? It could not have been a previous visitor, or Al would have had no reason to conceal it.

“You dropped this at the Tom Queen,” said Sir John disingenuously. “What is it?”

“I do not know.”

Nigel’s answer came after just a moment’s hesitation. The magistrate sensed a lie—but Nigel seemed to have a talent for handling several layers of deception. Where the truth lay, Sir John could not be sure.

Was he lying to conceal what he knew?

Was he lying to conceal the fact that he did *not* know?

“What does that signature say? Whose is it?”

“I do not know.”

Exhaustion had begun to show in Nigel’s voice.

Sir John sensed from the atmosphere and voices in the room that he was on the verge of collapse, and was propped up by Abbott. This was confirmed by Anne.

“Take him back to the holding cell to rest.”

“Abbott, lend me a hand.”

“The grave-robbers are in there. Must he be put in with them?”

Sir John remembered Nigel’s dizziness during the examination of

Evans's cadaver. The youth was surely used to dead bodies, while in the pub he had listened to a murder in the next room and then helped the killer escape. Barton had bemoaned Nigel's physical weakness, so there was no reason to doubt that it was real. But it was also useful for avoiding awkward situations.

"Anne, you are to handle the key. Abbott, once he is safely locked up, I forbid you to have any further contact with him."

"Yes, Sir John."

The magistrate removed his wig and let out a long breath. He groped across the table for the wine and poured himself a glass.

He was accustomed to his blindness. But it irked him not to know what Nigel Hart looked like.

Sir John recalled many faces from his first nineteen years, before losing his sight, and he had a habit of assigning faces from his memory to the people he met. When speaking to Anne, he thought of his younger sister's features. He constantly reminded himself of the people and things he had seen, to ensure that he retained those memories from the visible past. Once lost, after all, they could never be recovered.

Daniel Barton, Robert Barton, Guy Evans… . He could imagine the general outlines of each man's appearance. For Barton's pupils, too—Turner and the others—he could summon faces to mind that he did not think were too remote from reality.

To Nigel Hart, too, he had assigned a shy-looking face. But behind this mask seemed to be an unyielding obstinacy. If he still had the use of his own eyes, would he have been able to see through him? Or would he have been led further astray?

Anne and Abbott reappeared.

"Abbott, return home and stay there. Leaking information like that was a grave offence. I shall decide on your punishment tomorrow."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not even going to apologize?" demanded Anne.

"Please accept my apologies," said Abbott, without sounding very sincere.

Once his footsteps had faded out of earshot, Anne placed a cold metal key in her uncle's hand.

"The key to the holding cell," she said. "Two guards are on duty, but as

both are friendly with Abbott, I thought it imprudent to entrust them with it."

"Keep hold of it yourself," said Sir John. "What has weakened Abbott's defences like this? Is Nigel Hart so bewitching?"

"He seems no more than a shy young man to me. Although…"

"Although?"

"Gobbin and Dick, the grave-robbers in there with him, appear to be quite fond of him."

"They must be on familiar terms with Barton's pupils. Particularly with Turner and Hart, taking delivery of cadavers in the early morning before the others arrive."

"When we first brought Hart in, they were asleep in the cell. But as soon as they saw who it was they came wide awake, demanding to know if we had maltreated him. There might have been trouble if we had."

"Let us put them on trial tomorrow afternoon. They are charged with the excavation and removal of Elaine Roughhead's corpse, are they not?"

"Yes. Hart is now under their wing. Gobbin said, and I quote, 'If anything happens to Nigel, we won't forget who done it, not even if it was a bloody magistrate.' Forgive the language, but those are the words he used. It seems that Gobbin's son—even grave-robbers have children, apparently—is a mudlark, and was once in danger of being washed away by a sudden swell in the river. Turner and Hart happened to be passing by, and leapt in to save him. Later, when they heard that the boy had come down with pneumonia but Gobbin had no money for a doctor, they provided treatment and medicine without charging for it. In Gobbin's view, he owes his son's life to them. I understand they usually visited their young patient at night—some of the nocturnal outings that Wood said they went on must have been for this purpose."

Anne paused for a moment.

"Sir John," she continued. "I know that Turner and Hart should not have abetted Robert Barton. But I believe they did so solely to protect his brother—not out of any malicious intent."

"You were moved, then, by this poignant story of saving a child from drowning?"

"I was moved also by their willingness to accept punishment to save

their Professor's research—and by their faith in your ability to arrive at the truth, Uncle John."

From the sound of her voice, he suspected that her eyes might be a little moist.

We decided to trust you, sir. In retrospect, Nigel's words did have a pleasant ring to them.

When his half-brother Henry Fielding had accepted the post of magistrate, one thing he had firmly declared was that he would never sell justice for money.

Of course, Henry, also a well-known novelist, could hardly be called a paragon of virtue. He had run wild in his youth; spending freely but refusing to pay any of his numerous debts until a debtor brought suit; involved in duels and elopements; always needing to be the centre of attention… . His critics never lacked for material. There were even rumours of incestuous relations with his younger sister, although Sir John was too widely separated in age from him to have witnessed any such thing himself.

Nevertheless, Henry had been well loved by many friends. After being commissioned as magistrate, he had stayed true to his pledge, impartial and conscientious in his efforts to maintain the peace in London.

Sir John Fielding, who had inherited Henry's position, had in turn stayed true to the principles his brother had adopted.

But London was still far from safe. Even the owners of fairgrounds had to hire guards to watch over their customers.

Neither was the odious habit of offering justice to the highest bidder on the wane. Money could sway a jury with ease, and prosecutors and judges alike were known to respond to such incentives. Lawyers also employed unscrupulous means to have black declared white.

Sir John remembered the way a certain lawyer at the Old Bailey had undermined the testimony of an eyewitness at the murder scene by pointing out someone sitting in the gallery who closely resembled the accused—having located the person in advance and arranged for him to sit there.

Edward Turner's mistrust of the courts was not unwarranted.

To ensure a guilty verdict for Robert Barton, they would need evidence that presented not a sliver of doubt.

No such evidence existed in the case of Nathan Cullen and Thomas Harrington, but Evans was more promising. If they could arrest and

question Robert Barton, they should be able to obtain confessions for the first two murders as well. In any event, the murder of Evans alone would merit the death penalty.

Were they missing anything? They could not allow a corrupt lawyer to ruin it all in court.

He thought of the matters that had yet to be resolved.

First, the scrap of paper Al had found.

W-36753

A. Opp…

What could it mean?

Both Al and Nigel had known, and both had tried to conceal that knowledge. Moreover, both were so stubborn he doubted they would be more forthcoming under duress. Al had been cooperative otherwise, but regarding the scrap of paper he insisted he knew nothing.

Could it somehow concern the Professor?

Al, at least, had no connection with Evans's death—but he had lied about the paper anyway.

W-36753 appeared to be some sort of reference number. The number of a preparation? Who had signed it? And why write the date?

There was one other matter that had yet to be fully explained: Cullen's letter. That the boy had written it himself had been confirmed. But the ink-stain on it did not match the stain on the pocket that was supposed to have contained it. Where had the letter actually been found? What reason can there have been to lie about such a thing?

Nor could Sir John fully accept the explanation he had been given for Cullen's dismemberment. The reason offered for dumping the legs in the Thames, too, seemed plausible perhaps—but the idea of their being discarded because they bore evidence identifying the killer seemed more so.

What else was there? Ah, yes—Hume's unnatural manner when he claimed never to had met Nathan Cullen. Even this upright-seeming gentleman—in charge of the Temple Bank, no less—was hiding something.

There was also Turner's wound, which seemed likely to have been inflicted on the orders of someone unidentified.

Who—and why?

Sir John's first thought had been that Turner himself had planned the attack in order to exclude himself from suspicion. Perhaps, however, it had

actually been to draw the attention of the investigation to Evans's crimes—to the fact that he was eliminating those with any knowledge of Cullen's talents.

Anne's voice broke into his thoughts unexpectedly. "Wood said that Turner was something of a libertine. Perhaps he was a devotee of cock-fighting, too."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because on hearing the word 'Cocks,' he understood it to refer to the Tom Queen at once."

"'Cocks'? Did Abbott not tell Nigel the name of the establishment?"

"I was remiss in my report, I see. Evans's message for Robert Barton was the word 'Cocks,' nothing more. That was what Abbott had conveyed to Hart. Neither he nor I understood what it meant until we had followed Robert to the Tom Queen ourselves."

Chapter 20

Professor Barton let out a long sigh. He was about to finish a glass of wine when he noticed a visitor at the rear entrance.

"Al," he said. "What is it? Ben and Clarence told me about visiting the magistrate, to deliver evidence of Charlie's gluttony, and you being asked to stay behind. What did he want with you?"

"He had me accompany him to a pub called the Tom Queen."

"What for?"

"To help with the investigation."

"Good! Your ability has been recognized by Sir John himself!"

"I am not quite sure why he chose me, to be honest."

"All my pupils are exceptional. Were you able to be of use to him?"

"To an extent, I think."

"A tribute to you. And yet you sound subdued."

"He said that Edward is innocent."

"Really!?" Barton rose from his seat. "Why did you not say so at once, man?" he demanded, shaking him by the shoulders.

"You are treading on Charlie's tail, sir."

He hurriedly moved his foot. Charlie's eyes conveyed a silent protest at the injustice of it.

"It was your brother who did the deed. It has become apparent, too, that he had an accomplice."

"I see. So Edward and Nigel are both innocent! We must give Edward the news. Come—you must tell us the details. I *thought* that it might have been Robert. I suppose you found proof in this pub you went to with Sir John."

Barton kept talking as he strode up the stairs, until he was stopped at Edward's door by the constables.

"We know now that Edward is innocent," he told them. "You need watch him no longer. Unlock the door."

"Not without orders from the magistrate himself," said one. "Detainees are not allowed visitors."

"It is precisely the magistrate's orders that I am here to convey!"

"If that were so, you should have a signed document to that effect."

Barton cursed them for their obstinacy, then raised his voice and called

through the door: “Edward! Can you hear me? You have been declared innocent!”

“We will unlock the door when ordered to. In the meantime, please hold your peace, sir.”

“I shall obtain those orders now. Did the magistrate remain at the pub, Al?”

“No, he went home. Professor, I am sure that Edward’s release will be ordered tomorrow.”

“Al, I beg you, run to Bow Street and bring Nigel back tonight. As well as orders for Edward’s release. You are faster on your feet than I.”

“That much is true,” said Al. “I had better go, then.”

“Be careful. Covent Garden by night is—”

“A perilous place.”

After seeing him off at the rear exit again, Barton turned to go back inside, but then decided to head for the magistrate’s office as well. He was too agitated to sit and wait.

In the faint starlight, he could still see his pupil—but the path he was taking did not lead to Bow Street.

Al kept close to the buildings as he proceeded down a narrow lane. Barton followed him. He felt things squelch beneath his feet. This was the alley behind his own residence, but he seldom if ever had cause to come here.

Al stopped and crouched to pick up a pebble, then threw it high up to strike the rear window of Edward’s room.

Edward poked his head out. The deep shadows on his face in the candlelight made him look like someone whose illness had almost been fatal.

“We need to talk,” Al called.

“Come up,” Edward replied, leaning out of the window and pointing at something down below. He was weak in both voice and gesture.

The damned fool, thought Barton. No matter how unpleasant Edward found the surveillance under which he had been placed, he should never have moved that bed. *Take better care of yourself!*

A ladder lay on its side in the alley. As Barton watched, one end seemed to rise into the air of its own accord, but it was only an illusion caused by the darkness. A rope was tied to the top rung. The other end of the rope

disappeared through the window of the room above, where Edward was using it to pull the ladder up, hand over hand.

Al helped from below, guiding the thing so that it stood straight, then leaned against the window.

"Do you often use this exit?" he asked Edward. Barton was interested in the answer himself.

"From time to time."

Al scrambled lightly up the ladder and disappeared.

As their custodian, Barton felt he should follow. The climb was a trial. Holding the sides with both hands, he trod gingerly on the rungs until he finally arrived at the window himself. It was still wide open, so he could hear the voices inside.

"What happened to the bed?" That was Al.

"They kept opening the door to peer in. I pushed the bed against it to block it completely, then moved it back a fraction for Professor Barton's sake." Edward.

What Al said next gave Barton a jolt.

"Robert's accomplice was you, then."

There was no reply.

"I know you go to that pawnshop sometimes," said Al. "Oppenheimer's."

Another silence.

"Why should someone like you need to pawn anything?" asked Edward.

"There are things I cannot ask my father to buy."

There was a long pause

"What if I do go to pawnshops?" said Edward.

"Have you lost any tickets lately?"

Silence.

"*W* for 'Watch,'" said Al. "Signed by 'A. Oppenheimer.' I know that scrawl myself. You mentioned putting your watch in hock, as I remember."

He let this sink in, then went on.

"I found the ticket on the floor in the room next to the one Evans died in. I intended to hide it until I could ask you about it, but Sir John confiscated it. I did not tell him it was a pawn ticket, and neither he nor Miss Moore seemed to guess. I doubt that either of them know the first thing about pawnshops."

“What does it matter?” said Edward. “The fact is, I *was* in that room. I helped Robert escape after he killed Evans.”

Barton barely kept himself from crying out.

“They know about the cord. I helped them work it out.”

“No one ever said you were not sharp-witted.”

“Did you plan it all with Robert in advance?”

“No. When I learnt what he was going to do, I went to the room ahead of him and waited.”

“None of which is good for that wound of yours,” said Al. “Where did Robert escape to?”

“Here. With me.”

“What?” Al exclaimed. Barton almost did the same, but fortunately stifled the sound.

“I hid him in that wardrobe.”

“And then confessed to murder with Sir John as witness. What made you do something so foolish?”

“This did.”

There was another protracted silence.

Finally, Al whistled. “I am impressed!” he said. “And surprised Robert agreed to write it.”

“The man insisted that he did not kill Evans, that Evans was already dead when he arrived! Under those circumstances, however, suspicion would inevitably fall on him. I told him that if he wrote and signed this document, I would take the blame instead. He did not like the idea, so I warned him that I knew what he had done to Miss Roughhead—violated her, made her pregnant, then gave her arsenic and made it look like a suicide. ‘I have proof,’ I said, ‘and if you will not sign the document, I shall take my proof straight to the magistrate.’ A bluff, but it worked. Then I went a step further: ‘They strongly suspect you of Harrington’s murder, too. The way our fireplace is made was something you knew about.’ He started making excuses, saying Evans forced him to do it, but in the end he gave in. My offer of taking the blame for him was very tempting, after all. However, he insisted that he would only sign after I was made responsible in public. And for good reason, I suppose. After my false confession to Sir John, and Nigel was taken away, I let him out of the wardrobe and had him sign the papers. Even then, he was reluctant, so I made his situation clear to him.

Two constables were right outside the door. If he would not sign, I would call them in to arrest him, retract my confession, and accuse him of Miss Roughhead's death as well."

"The bed was to prevent anyone entering during all this, then"

"Yes. Robert helped me move it."

"And the bruises on your throat?"

"Second thoughts after he signed."

"He tried to strangle you?"

"When the constables started banging on the door, he gave up, both on choking me and trying to get the papers back, and fled through the window."

"Edward!" wailed Barton. "I would never have allowed you to be wrongly punished… ."

He then tried to climb inside, but slipped.

"That wound of yours was planned, I think."

No, it was not… . I fell… .

He hurt all over. Where had he fallen from? The ladder.

As the fog in his head began to clear, he realized that the question had not been addressed to him.

His circumstances finally became apparent to him. He was lying on the sofa in his own dissection room.

"It was indeed." The reply came from Edward.

But what was Edward doing down here?

"Why?" asked Al.

"You already know why."

"To make your theory that Evans was eliminating those who might get in his way seem more likely?"

"Correct."

"You overdid things."

"The person I hired was clumsy. It was supposed to be a flesh wound."

"Who was it?"

"None of your business."

"I am on your side, Edward, come what may. But you can't sacrifice yourself for Professor Barton's sake."

"Just leave it alone."

"It seems to me the more I know, the better. Otherwise, what I do might

accidentally work against you. Like your wound—I recorded it in detail, not realizing what you were up to. I suspect this led Sir John to deduce that it was intentional. If I had known, I would not have kept any notes."

"It was Peter."

"Peter?"

"The messenger boy outside the Temple Bank."

Barton recalled the pimply youth reclining in his battered chair.

"That was why you pawned your watch."

"Very perceptive of you."

"You could not have afforded his services otherwise."

So that had been who had stabbed Edward. In response, Barton tried to move, but a sharp ache in his lower back brought him to a halt immediately. He groaned.

"Professor! Please, keep still. We believe you may have hit your head."

"It was my back, actually."

"You were heavy. I carried you in myself. Edward is too weak to help."

"Thank you."

"One would never guess you were the younger brother," said Edward with a caustic smile.

"Even with a rope, getting from one window to another is quite a feat," said Al. He explained how Robert had escaped.

"Madness," said Barton. "Edward, you should not be up and about. Back to bed with you."

He was prevented from giving a longer lecture by the arrival at a run of one of the officers from upstairs.

"The accused has escaped through the window!" he announced. "I searched the lane, but found nothing. Mr. Barton, do you know—" Just then he caught sight of the accused on a chair in the room. His jaw dropped open. "Mr. Barton, did you help this man escape?"

"If escape was his objective, he would hardly be sitting in my dissection room."

"Professor Barton tripped and fell in the rear lane," said Edward innocently. "As his pupil, I felt I should use the ladder to attend to him. What other choice did I have with you blocking the door? But I shall return to my room now. Al, I leave the Professor in your good hands. He has not fractured anything, surely? With luck, a poultice should suffice."

Hunched over slightly as he favoured his wound, Edward climbed the stairs. The constables made a point of guarding him as he went, one in front and one behind.

Chapter 21

The magistrate had overslept.

"I shall be absent from this morning's session in court," he informed Anne after a rather late breakfast.

"An excellent idea, Uncle John, after working so late last night. Let us postpone it to the afternoon. I have one item to report: the Roughhead household has requested that Gobbin and Dick be set free. As you will recall, it was Sir Charles who originally brought them to book, but he now says he will drop the charges—on condition that they not say a word of the matter to anyone. He asks us to threaten them with immediate capital punishment should they start any rumours. It would not be difficult to justify. They are both inveterate thieves."

"Very well. No doubt Sir Charles did not relish the prospect of his daughter's pregnancy and so on being exposed in open court. Arrange for their release, and then bring Nigel Hart to my quarters."

Sir John repaired to his sitting room to wait. Behind his eyelids, he could sense the sunlight from the window. His ability to distinguish darkness and light, at least, was a small mercy.

He was just sampling the coffee his maid had brought when Anne and Nigel's footsteps drew near.

"Good morning, sir."

There was no fatigue in Nigel's voice.

"You slept well, I gather… . Take a seat."

"I informed the other two of their release," said Anne. "They were not displeased."

"Now," Sir John began, only to be interrupted by a servant announcing a visitor. His first thought was that it must be Hitchin, but the name the servant gave was Albert Wood.

Al greeted the magistrate as he entered the room, then turned to Nigel. "I spoke to Edward last night. He said you can tell Sir John everything—which is what I came here to impart."

Why, at the height of summer, was there the smell of coal in the air? Sir John found it strange. Who had brought in the smell—Al, or Nigel? But the holding cell had no coal in it.

There was concern in Nigel's voice as he asked how Edward was.

“Not very well. Moreover, Professor Barton has hurt his back.”

“How?!”

“A misjudged tumble.”

Al now gave the magistrate his attention.

“I lied to you yesterday, Sir John,” he said. “On one point.”

“I know it. That scrap of paper.”

“It is a pawn ticket.”

“Al, did Edward really say we could confide in Sir John?”

“How else would I know about Peter, for example?”

“By forcing Edward to talk, perhaps.”

“The pawn ticket,” Al told Sir John, “was left behind accidentally by Edward. He was Robert’s accomplice in the neighbouring room. Moreover, Edward arranged the attack on his person himself, hiring an acquaintance to wield the knife. He pawned his watch to pay for this service. He did not say who it was, however.”

The judge detected another evasion here. No doubt Al had agreed not to reveal the man’s name—although he had mentioned a Peter to Nigel.

A minor detail. Sir John elected to overlook it.

“What is the name and location of the pawnshop?” he asked.

“Oppenheimer’s, on Streatham Street.”

“It should have been me,” Nigel said. “All of it.”

Sir John noted this outburst with interest.

“Edward’s scheme was a complete success,” Al told Nigel buoyantly. “You were brought here before you could see it, but he obtained the signature he needed. I saw it myself. Professor Barton knows, too.”

Barely able to contain his excitement, Al explained for Sir John’s benefit how a contract had been extracted from Robert Barton.

“The Professor now has full possession of his preparations. Robert Barton shall continue to support his brother just as he has done to date. Upon his death, his assets shall be used to establish a Barton Foundation, providing funds for research as well as the anatomy school. It is all in writing. This is the price Edward imposed on Robert for taking the blame for murder. So… we are almost there, surely, Sir John? Edward did not commit a lethal crime. He only gave the culprit some assistance, and made a false confession—and this solely for unselfish reasons. We beg you to treat his case leniently.”

“I find it surprising that Robert Barton should sign such a document,” Anne remarked. “Did he fail to consider the possibility that Turner would retract his confession once he had the agreement in hand?”

“He had little choice,” Al said, and began to explain the events leading up to the signing.

“Wait a minute. Miss Roughhead died by her own hand, surely!”

“Edward heard a different account from Nelly, our cook… .” And he filled in the reasons why Robert was thought to be responsible for the girl’s death, too.

“Information like that,” said Sir John, “is to be shared with me first.”

“Robert Barton escaped through the window,” said Al. “No doubt he is in hiding now, waiting for Edward to be arrested and condemned.”

The previous search of Robert’s home by the Bow Street Runners had not turned up the man himself. Since then, they had been watching both front and rear entrances. Whether he was hiding at his wife’s family property would be revealed to them that night or the following day. He had not yet appeared at Evans’s residence, either.

“Al, how did you learn all this from Turner in person?” asked Sir John. “I had officers keep watch on his door. Were they so lax in performing their duty?”

If so, he thought, they might also have missed Robert slipping into and out of his own house.

“The window,” said Al. “I wanted to ask Edward about the pawnbroker’s note, so I threw a pebble at his window to attract his attention. He showed me a ladder that could be used to climb up. Nigel, is that how you and Edward get in and out for your excursions at night?”

Nigel only smiled in reply.

“I am letting you go, Mr. Hart,” Sir John decided.

The two of them gave a little cheer.

“Edward Turner will be indicted for abetting a crime, but that can wait until we have arrested Robert Barton himself.”

Something still nagged at him, however—something that remained unexplained.

The broken wine bottle. The smell of cosmetics.

Had Turner been with a whore at the Tom Queen? If so, her smell would

have lingered on him, not Nigel. What reason could there have been to soak Nigel in wine instead?

"I shall call off the guard outside Robert Barton's house, to make him feel it is safe to show himself. But I want one or two officers to stand watch in secret. Anne, arrange matters as necessary. Announce publicly that Edward Turner is to be charged with murder. The truth must remain confidential—at least until Robert is under arrest."

"Without Professor Barton and the rest of us knowing?" protested Al. "That might be difficult. Clarence and Ben are at the school as we speak, waiting for news. Am I to leave them in the dark?"

"I suppose not," said Sir John. "Very well. You may keep them informed, but exercise the greatest caution to ensure that the suspect does not get wind of it."

"Yes, sir," said Al. "About the surveillance on Robert's house—you might consider having us take on that duty. It is perfectly natural for us to be in the area, so we would not attract the sort of attention your officers might do. Clarence, Ben, and I can take turns and maintain a watch even at night. Nigel should be allowed to rest for the time being, after his detention."

"A sensible proposal," said Sir John. "I shall take you up on it. Take care, however, that Robert should not find out."

"We shall, I assure you."

As the pair of them took their leave, another visitor arrived. This time it was Hitchin, reporting just as Sir John had requested the evening before.

The marshal's footsteps were oddly irregular.

"Who was that young man leaving as I came in?" he asked, with scarcely even a greeting. His voice was as unsettled as his tread. "The younger of the two. Was he brought here in relation to some crime?"

"Why should that concern you?"

"I, er—I thought I recognized his face… ."

"From where?"

"Never mind. My mistake, I am sure."

"Speak plainly to me. Where did you meet the boy?"

"I cannot recall. It simply feels as though I have seen him before, that is all."

"Anne, call Nigel Hart back in."

He sensed Hitchin's restlessness after she left the room.

"Now, Mr. Hitchin. Pull one of those chairs closer, sit by me, and place your hand on mine."

The man's hand was as soft as an eiderdown quilt, albeit clammy with sweat.

"What business did you have at the Tom Queen last night?" asked Sir John.

"I was merely passing by. If I may say so, sir, I can see no grounds for complaining about where I choose to walk."

"I am sure you know what happened in that pub not long before."

"No. What did happen there?" There was genuine curiosity in his voice. Word must not have spread yet.

"You do know what manner of establishment the Tom Queen is?"

Hitchin clumsily denied it. "Ah… er, no."

"Like the Rose, it is a house of ill fame."

Hitchin groped for words. "That pamphlet was malicious," he said finally, and pulled his hand away as he did so. He then placed a leather pouch in the magistrate's palm instead. The bag was not large, but it was heavy and full.

Sir John felt for the drawstring, then opened and upended it.

The sound of gold on silver is a unique one. It is not only misers who find it pleasant.

"Regrettably," said Sir John, "we put out no basket here. Were you unaware of it?"

Arbitrators who openly solicited for bribes—leaving out "baskets" for them—were known as "basket justices."

"Take it away with you," said Sir John.

The sight of him down on the floor picking up the coins would surely have been a humiliating one. Hitchin had reason to be glad of the strip of black cloth that covered Sir John's eyes.

The pouch jingled faintly with every coin that was returned to it.

"Was there some law you wished me to bend in your favour?"

"Absolutely not," said Hitchin. "I merely—that is to say—"

Something seemed to shift within him, for rancour now filled his voice.

"I was tired of being harassed on the matter," he said. "My obligations make me a busy man. I was only walking past the inn, as I stated clearly,

and yet you refuse to listen. I thought this the most expedient way to put the matter behind me."

Three sets of footsteps drew near.

"I have returned with Mr. Hart," reported Anne. "Mr. Wood is with us too. He insisted, but he did agree to leave at once if you preferred."

"Anne, first of all, describe for me in detail Hitchin's reaction on catching sight of Nigel Hart. Then describe the latter's reaction."

"Hitchin's eyes fairly popped out of—excuse me; Hitchin's eyes widened and he stared at him, although he is now looking away. As for Mr. Hart, I noticed nothing unusual about his behaviour."

"A case of mistaken identity," said Hitchin, the lie immediately apparent to Sir John's ears. "May I leave, sir?"

"Nigel, do you know this man?"

"No," he replied calmly.

Hitchin made a hasty exit.

"Anne," said Sir John once the man was gone. "Were the soles of Al's shoes dirty, by any chance?"

"Yes. I had him wipe them thoroughly before entering this time."

"Was it mud? It is a sunny day."

"No, coal-dust. It made quite a mess, in fact."

"Al, where did you tread on some coal?"

Al thought for a moment. "I do not know," he replied.

"You said you climbed to Edward's window from the rear lane last night," Nigel muttered. "The coal chute is there too."

"Perhaps the pebble I threw was actually a bit of coal, then? It was too dark to tell. That does explain why my hand was so dirty."

Most houses in London stored their coal in a cellar with a chute at the rear of the building. This allowed the coal man merely to open the hatch and pour his load straight into the cellar, rather than tramp through the house.

"Is Robert Barton's coal chute in the same lane?" asked Sir John.

"Yes. Oh—do you suppose he was able to get into his house secretly that way?"

Chapter 22

On their return to the school of anatomy, Nigel and Al received a rousing welcome from the others— at least, those who were present: Professor Barton, Clarence, and Ben, accompanied by Charlie.

Al recounted what had happened at the magistrate's office.

Edward, whose stratagems had secured Robert Barton's signature on the written agreement, remained upstairs, saying he was still too weak to celebrate with them. Nigel retired to the bedroom too, citing fatigue.

"He was in a holding cell, after all. Hardly a hostelry."

"Robert is probably hiding in his own house," said Al. "The Runners are watching only the front and rear entrances. He may have slipped in through the coal chute."

"He would be as black as a sweep."

"Sir John is about to recall his officers. When he does so, we—at his specific request—are to take their place, watching Robert's residence without drawing any attention to ourselves."

"We shall be known as the Castle Street Runners," said Clarence.

"If Robert should get careless and show himself, one of us is to engage him in conversation while another gets word to Sir John."

A bottle of wine began to make the rounds.

As was their custom when their spirits were high, they soon broke into the Dissection Song.

S was a Scalpel, for stabbing precisely;

T was a Tourniquet, for strangling him nicely.

"So, who is to sponsor the indictment against Robert? Evans had no family, did he?"

"Do you think Edward will face trial as an accessory after the fact?"

"If so, we must hire the same lawyer as that mutineer had. He might be able to secure a verdict of not guilty due to extenuating circumstances."

"Helping someone escape is hardly a mortal sin. And he had good reasons for what he did."

"That lawyer will not be cheap, though."

"Whatever the expense," said Barton, pounding the table, "we shall hire a lawyer to secure Edward's freedom. Even if we must pawn every preparation in the building to do it!"

“But, Professor, if we lose the preparations, all Edward’s efforts will have been for nothing.”

The laughter at this prospect reflected the optimistic mood of the gathering.

Inwardly, however, Barton was in some distress: learning that one’s own brother was suspected of murder cannot have been easy to accept.

Chapter 23

Awaiting you at the Rose

That one line had been the entirety of the note the messenger boy had delivered to the magistrate's office. Who the letter was from the boy had been unable to say; he had simply been handed the paper and a tip as he waited by the side of the road.

"Unsigned, and—to judge by the childish-looking script—intentionally written with the wrong hand."

At Sir John's request, Anne had compared it to their collection of people's handwriting, just in case, but she found no match. Of the writing of Charles Hitchin, alleged patron of the Rose, they had no sample yet.

The magistrate blew his nose loudly. "Despite the courtesy of the invitation, I find little joy in the prospect of attending a gathering of pederasts."

"*I* shall go."

"Out of the question, Anne. The Rose is no place for a woman."

"I could take Abbott for protection."

Sir John shook his head.

"He has disgraced himself, I know," Anne said. "But let us give him a chance to make amends."

Women were not even allowed into the Rose. Anne was accustomed to dressing as a man for her duties, but she took even greater care to conceal her femininity for this excursion. By candlelight, she could pass.

Cigar smoke curled towards the ceiling in the dimly lit room. It was hard to make out anything clearly, but even so, everywhere Anne looked she saw something she would rather not.

They sat at a table in the corner. A waiter dressed in women's clothes came to pour two glasses of punch, then draped himself over the two of them as if hoping for further attention. Abbott brushed him away.

What Anne saw next she was unable to clearly recall afterwards. When the time came to make her report to the magistrate, she had trouble distinguishing what she had actually seen from what might have been a dream.

She was familiar with punch, a then-popular drink combining liquor,

sugar, lemon, water, and tea. But perhaps something else, something conducive to hallucinations, had been added to it here.

Several years had passed since the death of the printmaker William Hogarth, but that night it was as if his final work, *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism: A Medley*, had come to life before her eyes.

A squatting woman—or a man in woman's clothing—pulled up her skirts to give birth to a litter of rabbits. Beside her, a girl—or boy—spewed out a shower of nails and pins. There was a man in priestly vestments who opened them to reveal himself, while he held aloft an image of a witch suckling a cat. A rickety dwarf plunked away at a virginal off to the left in the rear, with a crowd of little figures of some sort dancing above him.

One by one, the waiters snuffed out the candles. Darkness filled the room like a rising tide.

A fire had been lit at the back of the room, and a cauldron bubbled on it as if in readiness for Macbeth and Duncan.

But what arrived instead was a girl clad in gauzy silks. Or was it a youth? "Titania, Titania!" cried the audience as they burst into applause. The Queen of the Fairies reached into the basket that dangled from her arm and began tossing the items she found there into the metal pot, one after another. Her features were blurred by the steam, but every so often she seemed for a moment to be a wrinkled hag.

Then a man in his underwear emerged, an ass's head covering his own, and began to frolic around her. The head-dress concealed his face, but his sagging, corpulent body was on full display.

"Watch out for Oberon, Bottom! He'll kill you!" shouted someone in the audience.

"Where *is* the king? His wife's about to cuckold him!" cried another.

The last thing Titania produced from her basket was part of a leg, raw and scarred around the ankle, which she raised above her head and, with a curse, flung not into the cauldron but straight into the flames below… .

Chapter 24

Not long before noon the following day, Daniel Barton's dissection room was once again honoured by a visit from Sir John Fielding, Justice of the Peace, accompanied by Anne Moore on one side and Dennis Abbott on the other.

The only others present apart from Barton himself were Clarence and Charlie. Edward and Nigel were both still upstairs. Nelly was taking their meals up to them.

"Sir John," said Clarence, "I was just about to call on you with our report. The three of us took turns watching Dr. Barton's house, but saw no sign of his having returned. There were no lights in the windows. At around eight o'clock this morning, a maid emerged from the rear entrance while I was watching. I inquired casually if Dr. Barton was well. (Was that a bad idea?) She said that the master of the house had been away for some time. I could not tell if she was telling the truth or not, lacking your sense of hearing, sir. Al and Ben remain on watch as we speak."

While Clarence chattered on like this, a plain coffin was carried in by some Bow Street Runners.

"Mr. Barton, we have need of your services once more."

Al and Ben then joined them in the room.

"I relieved them of their duties," explained Sir John. "Surveillance of Dr. Barton's residence will no longer be necessary, I think. Last night—I should say this morning, before dawn—a fire broke out at Evans's house."

The students began to murmur among themselves.

"Through the efforts of a fire-brigade, however, the blaze was extinguished."

Fire-fighting was handled by private units organized by insurance companies. Their goal was to bring fires under control quickly to minimize the amount that had to be paid on insurance policies. These private firemen, however, did not protect buildings that were not insured by their employers, and showed no great eagerness to save lives either. Their principal task was to prevent the building itself from burning down.

"No servants appear to have been in the house," said Anne. "Presumably they left the place when the death of their master made them unneeded."

The cadaver that was produced from the coffin and laid face-down on the dissecting table had been badly burnt. It was naked, and scarcely a trace of its hair remained. The skin on its back was charred.

"Only this corpse was found on the premises."

"I don't think even a Frenchman would eat a steak like this," said Clarence.

"A German might, though," said Ben.

"Go and get Nigel," said Barton. "We need him drawing." As Ben disappeared upstairs, he called after him, "If he lacks the energy, leave him be! Although that would be a shame."

"Is Mr. Hart not in good health?" asked Anne.

"Confinement seems to have taken his toll on him," said Barton, a hint of criticism in his voice.

"He was not ill treated."

"It must have been trying mentally, however," said Clarence in a similarly critical tone.

The instruments were prepared for the dissection. Charlie's ears pricked up at the clink of metal on metal.

Ben returned to report that neither Edward nor Nigel were able to leave their room.

"It cannot be helped," said Barton. "Let us begin. Al, make your record detailed. It will have to do instead of drawings. Ben, Clarence, roll the cadaver over onto its back."

For a few moments, Barton and his three pupils were lost for words.

The back of the cadaver had been scorched, but the front was quite untouched; the body must have been face-down on the floor. The face was swollen, but not unrecognisably so.

"Rare."

It took a moment for Barton to grasp the tasteless joke one of his pupils had made. At the same time, he realized that it was only through black humour of this kind that such events could be endured.

"Do you recognize this man?" asked Sir John.

Barton sighed, then nodded. "It is my brother," he said.

"Anne, you had better not watch the dissection. Go and talk to Turner and Hart."

"Sir John. As your eyes, I need to get accustomed to every sort of sight.

I should like to stay."

"The reason why only the back is burnt," said Barton, "is that, as the flames rose around him, he was lying on his front, unable to move. There is no indication that he was bound, so he may have been unconscious… ."

"The body was found in what appeared to be Evans's office, which was probably the source of the blaze. An extensive collection of ledgers was reduced to ash there."

"My brother… must have slipped in and set the fire to destroy any record of his debts. Then, for some reason, he was unable to get out. That seems to fit what we see here."

He paused, then told his pupils to open the body.

Around an hour later, he had this to say: "The cause of death was drowning. Drowning, moreover, that occurred quite some time before the fire was lit this morning."

Chapter 25

In the court attached to the magistrate's office on Bow Street, Sir Saunders was seated in a slightly raised chair, pronouncing a judgement that would send the defendant before him to Fleet Prison for not paying his debts.

The door to the courtroom was guarded by two officers but not closed, allowing Barton to peer in at the proceedings as he walked past on his way down the broad corridor. He had never observed one of the trials that were held here before.

Clarence all but entered the room in his eagerness to see inside, until one of the guards prodded him back. Al and Ben were otherwise occupied, helping Edward and Nigel make their way along the corridor.

An officer led them into an area they had not been in before: Sir John's hearing room.

The magistrate was already there, at ease in his chair as Anne read the newspaper to him.

Near the wall on the right was a long, narrow table, with chairs set out only on the side closest to the wall. These faced Sir John's perch at some distance from it.

As soon as Barton and his pupils had taken their seats, another man waddled in.

He approached the judge to greet him. Anne directed him to one end of the table. There was no chair there, so Charles Hitchin simply stood, like a suspect in the dock.

"He should rest his gut on the table," Clarence whispered to Ben, eyeing the man's considerable girth. "He makes you look positively slim."

"Mr. Hitchin," said Sir John from behind his own table. "This room is not a court proper, and we are not at trial. There is no clerk to record the proceedings, and no spectators. Only those with some connection to the case are present. You will not be asked to swear on a Bible, and were you to lie, you could not be charged with perjury."

Barton wondered if the city marshal could feel the magistrate's gaze fixed on him through the strip of black cloth.

"That said, I hope that you will speak truthfully."

Hitchin nodded, jowls wobbling.

“What do they call that young performer at the Rose?”

“Titania,” he said, looking quickly at Nigel and away.

It seemed to Barton that Sir John’s sheer force of will left Hitchin no room for hesitation.

“And who is Oberon?”

“Him,” said Hitchin, not looking but jerking his thumb at Edward, who was leaning on his neighbour’s shoulder.

“That will do. You are dismissed,” said Anne.

“Is that all?”

“It is.”

Perhaps afraid that he risked being sent to Newgate if he remained, Hitchin left in a hurry.

After this mound of flesh was gone, the magistrate had Dennis Abbott step up.

“This room is not a court proper… ,” he began, giving the same speech he had given Hitchin, though his tone was far milder. He followed this by saying, “I had Anne tell me, once more, what happened when Robert Barton hurt his hand on the staircase at the Tom Queen. As I understand it, a heavily painted woman passed him on the stairs, then covered your head with her dress and laughed. Did you realize it at that moment?—that she was your ‘witch,’ I mean.”

Abbott’s heavy jaw remained closed.

“Refusal to deny is as good as an affirmation.”

“No. I did not realize it at that moment.”

“You do now, though.”

“Yes,” he replied in a voice drained of all colour.

“You are dismissed.”

“I shall resign my position, sir.”

“If you insist.”

“Mr. Barton. I trust there is no need to enlarge upon the exploits of your two prize pupils.”

If only I had looked in on them that night, thought Barton. But the door had been locked, his knock on the door was unanswered, he thought them asleep and had not wanted to wake them… . There had been no need to go as far as they had. Lost preparations could be made anew. *But if I were to lose the two of you…*

“Abbott sent word to Nigel Hart that Robert Barton and Evans were to meet at the Tom Queen inn,” Sir John said, addressing the two pupils in question. “It was the perfect opportunity to eliminate them both. The pair of you at once concocted a plan to murder Evans and saddle Robert with the blame. What was Hart’s role in that plan? Exactly what Turner claimed to have done originally—except that Hart was dressed as a prostitute. Frocked and powdered, he entered the room reserved for Robert and Evans in advance, added some laudanum to the wine, hid behind the sofa, and then strangled Evans once the latter was insensible. Hart’s lack of physical strength forced him to tie one end of the man’s cravat to a chair to accomplish this deed. Once it was done, he left the room—passing Robert coming the other way, and taunting Abbott… . You are a man of some audacity, Hart. Robert entered the room, saw the dead body, and panicked. Under the circumstances, suspicion would be sure to fall on him. To leave by the door would be too hazardous. He was saved by Edward Turner, who had been waiting in the next room and now called to Robert from the window and helped him escape. Robert may have found it suspicious that Turner was there, but he had no time to hesitate. The rest is as Turner has already said—although he did not mention using some wine to mask the smell of Nigel’s cosmetics… . Naturally, Robert would insist that he had arrived at the room to find Evans already dead there, but the circumstances were highly unfavourable to him. What is more, if Albert Wood is to be believed, you—Turner—also threatened Robert by bringing up Harrington’s killing, and the violation and murder of Elaine Roughhead.”

Sir John’s voice had remained even and calm throughout his speech. Now it grew a good deal warmer—almost kind.

“Turner,” he said. “Stand over there.” He indicated the position that Hitchin and Abbott in turn had occupied earlier.

His face ashen, Edward began to rise to his feet. Barton stopped him.

“My lord,” Barton said. “Sir John. I entreat you. Edward is not fully healed yet.”

Edward gave Barton’s hand a light, then firmer squeeze before going to the spot Sir John had indicated. He spread his legs slightly, clasped his arms behind his back, and stood straight.

“You killed Robert right after he signed the papers, did you not?”

“I did.”

“How did you overpower him? There cannot have been much opportunity to slip opium into a drink in a critical situation like that.”

Al raised his hand, seeking permission to speak. “If Edward did kill Robert, it was lawful self-defence,” he said. “Robert did sign the papers, but tried to kill Edward afterwards. There were marks on his neck where Robert had attempted to strangle him. I saw them myself. They are gone now, but…”

“I regret to inform you, Al, that such an act cannot be deemed self-defence. How did you overcome him, Turner?”

“It was a close thing when he assaulted me, but fortunately I knew how to incapacitate him. There is a certain point on the body which can be used to deprive a man of his senses almost at once.” Edward tapped the area of the carotid artery with one finger.

“Anne, read the record of the dissection received from Professor Barton.”

“‘In case of death by fire,’” read Anne, “‘blistering occurs in the airway due to the inhalation of heated air. No such burns were observed in the case of Robert Barton’s cadaver. It can therefore be concluded that he was already deceased when the fire broke out. His lungs were visibly swollen, filling his thoracic cavity and covering the front of the pericardium. Water, combined with blood, had seeped out of his lungs and into his chest. All of these are characteristic of drowning. In summer, this fluid would remain in the thoracic cavity for three or four days, after which it would begin to leak and spread throughout the body. As a result, the subject cannot have drowned earlier than the ninth of July.’”

“Well, naturally enough,” said the magistrate, a thin smile on his lips. The Evans incident had occurred on the twelfth of July. “After Robert was incapacitated, we believe you plunged his face into a basin of water and drowned him,” he said to Edward. “Why employ this particular method? Drowning is indicative of malice and murderous intent.”

“In the misplaced hope that it might make things easier,” said Edward. “I thought that if I threw him into the Thames later, no suspicion would fall on me. I hid his body in the wardrobe until I could carry out that plan.”

“If, instead of this expedient, you had strangled or beaten him to death, a competent lawyer might have taken the route that Al suggested earlier, and secured a verdict finding you not guilty by reason of self-defence.

Instead, your scheme has put you in danger of losing your life. Whose services did you intend to engage to carry the body to the Thames?"

"I cannot say."

"Gobbin, then."

There was no reply.

"We learnt from the pawnbroker the amount you received in exchange for your watch. Seven pounds, Mr. Oppenheimer said. His account books confirmed this. A considerable sum. You hired someone to wound you, yes. Their remuneration would have been a guinea at most. You used the rest to grease the wheels with Gobbin, in addition to calling on his sense of obligation to you for saving his child's life."

Edward still remained silent.

"Instead of casting the body into the river, you had Gobbin convey it to Evans's house. The entrance there was being watched. Gobbin went in through the coal cellar, I suppose?"

"I carried the body myself."

"No, I did," said Nigel, getting to his feet and standing beside him.

Anyone could see that Nigel lacked the strength for the task. At present, Edward was hardly better suited to it, either.

"Edward Turner, I contend that you and Gobbin entered Evans's house through the coal chute, with Gobbin doing the heavy work. Subsequently, you may have sent him home. Then you, Edward Turner, laid the corpse face-down, doused it with oil, placed Robert's promissory notes on top of it, and set the whole lot ablaze. Meanwhile, Nigel Hart was at the Rose performing those preposterous rites of his. That, surely, was the reason for your fatigue, Mr. Hart. You were not particularly tired when released from detention. Nor were you mistreated during it.

"Edward Turner, what made you change your plan from immersing the body in the Thames to transporting it to Evans's house and burning it along with all record of his debt?"

"You already have the answer, I think," said Edward coolly.

"If Dr. Barton was simply missing, his body undiscovered," said Sir John, "funding for Professor Barton's research and anatomy school would be imperilled. Discarded in the Thames, the body might indeed go unfound —or be found too late to be readily identifiable. This was why you changed course, was it not? In either case, disposal of the records at Evans's house

would have been required. Evans himself appears to have been heirless, but if left undisturbed the documents might have fallen into someone else's hands eventually."

"And I killed Evans," Nigel reminded him.

"Just as I killed Robert," said Edward.

Barton felt the blood drain from his extremities. "Can't be true," muttered Clarence on one side of him. "They did nothing of the sort," said Ben on the other. Their reaction echoed his own.

Jointly, however, Edward and Nigel disclaimed any part in starting the fire.

"You are indeed a cunning pair," said Sir John. "There can be no trial, whatever the crime, if no one brings suit, as you are well aware. No one appears likely to finance a suit on Evans's behalf. Professor Barton, is there anyone who might indict Edward Turner for the death of Robert Barton? Robert's wife, perhaps?"

"If the matter came to trial, too much would become public—Harrington, young Cullen, all of it. I do not believe that my sister-in-law would wish that. My brother went to Evans's home to retrieve certain documents. Through some misadventure, a fire broke out while he was there and he perished in the blaze. That is how I would explain things to her. If I hinted also at the suspicions that surrounded Robert, I doubt she would pursue the matter."

"These two shrewd pupils of yours made the same calculation, it seems. Their assumption was that there would be no trial. That was why they confessed. Is that not so, Turner? Hart? Arson, however, cannot be dismissed so easily; if nothing else, the insurance company will bring suit for that. As a result, it is arson alone they will not admit to."

Al got up, pushing his chair back, and sought leave to speak again.

"Sir, surely the insurance company will not seek an indictment. Their contract was with Evans, whose death leaves them free of any obligation to pay anything to anyone. They will not waste time and money on a lawsuit. Edward and Nigel have allowed themselves to be misled."

This provoked several of the others to join in with their own loud opinions, to which Barton contributed what sounded more like a wail than words.

Sir John struck the table with his gavel.

“Turner,” he said, once there was silence. “You wanted me to know you were the culprit. Why? You dropped the pawn slip intentionally as evidence, did you not? There was no need to bring it to the murder scene in the first place. On the night of the fire, you cordially invited me to the Rose, indicating that you and Hart were regular patrons of that squalid establishment. With this pointer, I was able to retrace your steps towards the murder of Evans and Robert. Why did you conceal your deeds with your right hand, only to expose them with your left?”

The magistrate fell silent, waiting for an answer. When none came, he spoke again.

“The two of you sought above all else to protect Daniel Barton’s research, his preparations, and of course his anatomy school. You murdered Evans and Robert for this cause, thinking that because there would be no one to bring suit against you, I would have no power to punish you. On the basis of this assumption, you revealed the truth. There was also the matter of Hitchin happening to encounter Hart. Once his testimony had made it clear that Hart was accustomed to dressing as a woman, the probability that I would determine the identity of the person who importuned Abbott at the Tom Queen was high. Before all this could be discovered, you invited me to the Rose and disclosed it yourself. Did you never consider, however, that I, as a Justice of the Peace, might have the responsibility of paying to bring charges against you myself?”

Barton was stunned. Even if they were not put on trial, murder was murder. *And all for my sake…* . Did Edward hope to reveal another culprit in court, or was he confident of escaping punishment by employing a skilled lawyer to impress upon the jury the iniquity of Robert and Evans?

Sir John seemed to be wondering the same thing. “Do you intend to publicly accuse another of the deed?” he asked.

“No. In the presence of Professor Barton and all my fellow pupils, I shall state quite clearly: Nigel and I are to blame.”

“The prospect of hanging does not concern you?”

“It does not.”

“I will not allow it!” shouted Barton, getting to his feet. Al, Ben, and Clarence also raised their voices in protest.

“Order!” cried Sir John, banging the gavel again. “Be seated!”

When the room had settled down, he spoke again.

“Nigel Hart, as I recall, you said, ‘We decided to trust you.’ Did you also mean that you trusted me not to indict you?”

Nigel only smiled in reply.

“Guy Evans and Robert Barton were plainly guilty of serious wrongdoing. It is not certain, however, that a court of law would have sentenced them to death. They might even have been found innocent. And so you took matters into your own hands. You are critical of the law, and do not trust it; in sympathy with your attitude, you thought I would refrain from bringing suit against you. Was this your understanding?”

Barton rose again, placing both hands on the table and leaning forward over it.

“Sir John,” he said. “I also trust you. My pupils did not commit these crimes for personal gain. It was all for my sake. To preserve *my* research, *my* preparations, *my* anatomy school. I humbly entreat you: if you must indict someone for these crimes, let it be me.”

The judge paused, in some astonishment.

“Edward Turner, Nigel Hart,” he said eventually. “In the matter of the murder of Guy Evans and Robert Barton, I am not inclined to put you on trial.”

A murmur of relief rippled across the room. Then Clarence cheered. Ben and Al followed his lead.

The gavel was banged again. “However!” Sir John said. “There is another case in connection with which a suit against you shall certainly be brought. I speak of the murder of Nathan Cullen.”

“But the culprit is dead!” cried Barton. Uproar. The sound of the gavel once more.

“Circumstances suggest that the murder was indeed committed by Robert Barton. It was Edward Turner who championed this belief. Cullen, we gather, managed to escape from his confinement at Evans’s residence, and went to seek refuge with his friends, Turner and Hart. Robert, who was lying in wait, intercepted and killed him, arranging the scene to appear a suicide. He had received news of Cullen’s escape via his dog, Bess, who had been left with Evans in advance; Evans allowed Cullen to leave intentionally, and released the dog at the same time. When Bess arrived back at Robert’s home, he knew that Cullen would not be far behind.

“This was your conclusion, was it not, Edward Turner? Anne,

summarize the report we received from Robert's maid."

"The maid said that the dog was at home on both the ninth and tenth of July. She remembers it well because, on the ninth, there was a bit of a fuss when Bess was kicked by the pure collector. We interviewed the latter, who affirmed the truth of her account. Cullen's murder took place in the dead of night between the ninth and tenth of that month."

"Your theory that the dog was left with Evans has proved incorrect," Sir John told Edward. "You and Nigel Hart went to great lengths to paint Robert as the killer. You poured the ink on Cullen's chest yourselves. You sought to imply that something lay beneath it, when you knew that nothing did; you inked Cullen's fingers to mislead me. To reinforce the impression that Evans was eliminating those who knew of Cullen's talent, you even hired someone to injure you."

What Barton saw on Edward's face could only be described as a smirk. Nigel was also smiling faintly. Barton had never seen such a disquieting look there.

The magistrate's tone softened. "Each of you has confessed to committing murder. Tell me the truth about Nathan Cullen. You would have stopped at nothing to dispose of Evans and Robert. Is that not so?"

Neither of them replied.

"Would you go so far as to kill Cullen to bring down Robert? Surely not. The boy's death was a suicide, and you made use of the corpse—was that what happened? Was the first reason you gave for dismembering him—to make his suicide seem to be murder—the truth? Not so that he could be buried on hallowed ground, but in order to cast suspicion on Robert?"

I have little respect for him. The Professor recalled Edward's comment in the tavern. And Nigel's angry outburst. *Dr. Barton is fraudulent. He brags that the results of your research, Professor, are his own. Edward's, too.* "Little respect" hardly did the matter justice.

"Did Cullen commit suicide?" repeated Sir John.

Both remained silent.

"But some details are incompatible with that verdict. He had safely escaped confinement and reached your school. He was free. He had no reason—absolutely none—to do away with himself. Also, there was no means by which Robert could have been informed of his escape, and so

Robert could not have been lying in wait to kill him. This brings us back to our original assumption.

"Cullen's letter was delivered to the two of you while he was still confined, by means unknown. There is evidence that you saw the letter in advance. When you told me that you had amputated his limbs, you mentioned that Cullen had been imprisoned in Newgate. But you also claimed to have learnt of his confinement by Evans only later, after reading the letter—post-dismemberment."

Sir John paused, with his head still facing Edward.

"Without reading the letter, you had no way of knowing of his imprisonment or the marks left by the leg irons. But you did know these things. You received his letter before that evening, and once he finally escaped and ran to you, you killed him. All to make a murderer of Robert."

Almost defiantly, Edward said, "We expected you to arrive at that conclusion, sir, once you noticed the inconsistencies regarding the suicide theory and the dog."

The end of his comment was partly overshadowed by an anguished sound from Barton. *There were extenuating circumstances for the murders of Evans and Robert. But an innocent boy? How could you act so monstrously? I could never approve of this! Not for all the preparations in the world!*

"You even applied an ink-stain to support your claim that the letter had been in Nathan's pocket, although the disparity between the stain on the paper and that on his clothing only made me suspicious. You did not know at that time that Robert had already killed Harrington. Otherwise, I am sure, you would have accused him of that crime, without any need to murder Cullen.

"Edward Turner, what did you do with the discarded legs?"

"Nigel wanted to use them in his magic act," said Edward.

Sir John gave Anne a signal. She nodded and left the room, then returned with a middle-aged woman.

The woman's dress was plain but clean. Her eyes were swollen from crying.

"This is Mrs. Cullen," said Anne. "Nathan's mother. We located her eventually, and brought her here to take possession of her son's body. She was waiting in another room."

Barton shuddered to think what she must have felt on arriving to find her son dismembered, dissected, and half-putrefied.

"Mrs. Cullen, this is Edward Turner and Nigel Hart, about whom we told you earlier."

The woman glared at them, eyes dark with hostility. She then seized a fistful of Edward's shirt and shook him. "Give me back my son!" she cried. "Bring him back to life! Put him back together!"

"Mrs. Cullen," said Sir John. "Will you bring suit against Edward Turner and Nigel Hart for the murder of your son?"

"I will," she said. "Oh, aye, I certainly will."

Chapter 26

Edward and Nigel stood in the dock while the principal prosecutor laid out the case against them, gesturing floridly to emphasize the cruelty of their actions to the row of jurors on his left. Turner, the prosecutor explained, had been the chief offender, with Hart his accessory.

"Dr. Robert Barton, may he rest in peace, was a physician of high renown, welcome even at the Palace. I am sure, gentlemen of the jury, that you are familiar with his achievements. In his support for his younger brother Daniel, too, he was unstinting. And yet one of Daniel's pupils, Edward Turner, wrongly believing that Dr. Barton had stolen the results of his own research, nursed a murderous grudge against his teacher's benefactor… ."

Sir John Fielding, Westminster magistrate, sat with Anne in the front row of the gallery. The smell of vinegar and herbs to guard against prison fever assailed his nostrils. His head cold had cleared, leaving him exposed to these pungent odours. "Left alone, a cold will clear up in a week," Osborne had said, preparing some medicine, "but this will dispel yours in just seven days." An experienced physician was truly a fount of wisdom.

Edward had been spared the misery of a lengthy imprisonment in Newgate: he had spent the ten days leading up to the trial in the holding cell at the magistrate's office. Sir John, for his part, had done all he could to hasten the opening of the trial. Nigel, as a mere accomplice, had been discharged on his own cognizance, on condition that he keep the court informed of his whereabouts. Now that the case had been formally taken up at the Old Bailey, Sir John had no further role to play. Everything now rested in the hands of Lord Chief Justice William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, principal prosecutor Reginald Boyle, and Nicholas Hooper, counsel for the defence.

Lord Mansfield and Boyle were both for sale. This was common knowledge. However, in the present trial, at least, no dirty money had changed hands. Of this Sir John was sure.

He did feel that the prosecutor's opening argument had been far too one-sided. Boyle had not even mentioned that the actions taken by the accused had been for Daniel Barton's sake. Instead, he had divided his

speech between praise for the noble character of Robert Barton and denunciation of Edward Turner's villainy and delusions.

To achieve a guilty verdict was, of course, the prosecution's goal. Forceful rhetoric was only to be expected. Counsel for the defence was also likely to use every trick at its disposal to have the defendant ruled not guilty.

"Thus," continued Boyle, "to satisfy his loathing, this vicious youth decided to misrepresent Dr. Barton as a murderer in the eyes of the world. He concocted a scheme in which an innocent lad, Nathan Cullen…"

Mrs. Cullen's anguished voice could be heard at the mention of the name.

Nicholas Hooper, the lawyer Edward and Nigel had retained, was unfamiliar to Sir John. According to Anne, he did not appear to be overly burdened with experience, or many other qualities, for that matter.

Barton had wanted to hire the lawyer who had distinguished himself in the recent slave trial. Sir John was acquainted with the man, whose fees had risen along with his fame. So why had Edward and Nigel hired this hesitant newcomer instead? Had the other lawyer quoted them a fee so high that even Barton could not pay? Or had they decided that it did not matter who represented them, since they were doomed to lose anyway?

Sir John had had no contact with Barton or anyone else connected with the case since making the decision to send Edward and Nigel to the Old Bailey. He had no wish to give anyone cause to suspect the brokering of deals before the trial began.

Once Boyle concluded his remarks, the assistant prosecutor called the plaintiff, Mrs. Cullen, to the witness stand. Her testimony was frequently interrupted by sobbing.

"The lawyer is holding her hand to encourage her," reported Anne.

"And the Chief Justice?"

"Examining his fingernails with obvious boredom."

The case must be trivial indeed by Lord Mansfield's standards. He did not stand to profit or lose from either side's victory. No doubt his aim was to bring the matter to a swift resolution in accordance with the jury's finding and retire to his chambers as soon as possible.

Barton and his pupils were in the front row as well, a few seats away from Sir John and Anne.

The Professor was beside himself, swinging between extremes of hope and discouragement.

What Edward and Nigel had done was clearly indefensible. Hanging was the only possible outcome for them. Well—their youth might see them sentenced to transportation, to serve as labour in the New World… but that was a fate *worse* than hanging. Nigel would not last two weeks. Despite the venality of their crime, however, Barton could not help muttering objections to each helping of scorn and invective the prosecutor heaped upon Edward. At one point, he even received a warning from the bailiff when he finally lost his temper and shouted "You are misinformed, sir!" at the startled lawyer.

Their own lawyer's hapless demeanour also irked him. Barton had had every intention of engaging the lawyer from the mutineer's trial—the one who had employed the ingenious device of replacing the entire jury. The problem was money. Barton had seriously considered pawning his preparations. When he had mentioned the idea to Al and the others, half in jest, they had been far from amused. But when Edward had learnt of his teacher's plans during visiting hours, his face had gone white with anger. *Professor, why on earth do you think I resorted to all this in the first place? If you allow the preparations to go, you will kill me before any hangman can!*

Barton had sought the advice of Hume at the Temple Bank, and it was he who had introduced them to Hooper. The young lawyer came cheap, yet Hume assured him that this was a man to be relied upon.

And look where they were now!

Hume had said that he and his wife would attend the trial as spectators, but he had yet to arrive. Barton had a seat for Mrs. Hume saved beside him.

"Counsel," said Lord Mansfield to Hooper. "Begin your cross-examination."

"Er, yes, m'lud," said Hooper, plopping his wig back onto his head as he got to his feet.

When he did not speak for a moment, Lord Mansfield repeated his instruction, with some irritation. "Begin the cross-examination."

Mrs. Cullen, meanwhile, was staring angrily at the man who proposed to defend the monsters who had taken her son's life.

"Counsel! Your cross-examination!"

“Yes, m’lud.” Hooper looked aimlessly around him.

Barton became aware of someone hurrying down the aisle towards the front of the gallery, and turned to see who it was.

“The Humes have arrived,” Anne told Sir John.

Sir John recognized the banker’s footsteps, but not the others’. “I hear three people,” he said quietly. “Who is with them?”

“The party consists of Mr. Hume, a woman whom I suppose to be his wife, although I have not seen her before, and a nursemaid carrying a baby.”

“Please excuse our lateness,” Hume said to Barton, mopping his forehead with a handkerchief. “Our carriage was delayed by some geese being herded to market.”

Finally Hooper spoke.

“Mrs. Cullen, a question,” he said, pointing in the direction of the Humes. “Do you know—”

Before he could finish, however, Mrs. Cullen’s actions answered his question in full.

She left the witness stand and ran straight in the direction in which Hooper was pointing.

Mrs. Hume scooped little Danny from the arms of his nursemaid.

Mrs. Cullen examined the nursemaid for a moment, then took hold of her white mob-cap and pulled it off. The chestnut curls that had shown beneath the cap came away with it, revealing a head of much shorter hair.

Mother and son embraced at last, holding each other as tightly as if they had been carved from stone.

Chapter 27

How long had he lain unconscious?

Waking now, Nathan found himself lying on a bed.

"Don't be afraid. This is our room."

Someone was holding a candle over him and peering closely at his face. Edward and Nigel.

They smelt subtly of drink. The scent of face-powder was in there too. Edward explained that, returning from a night out, they had heard a noise in the students' dissection room.

"You were in trouble there."

Nathan felt some pain in his left arm. Glancing down, he saw that it was heavily bandaged.

"You are all right," Edward said. His voice was a great comfort to Nathan. "The blade did not reach the artery. If that had been opened, you would have died in a minute, but he ran off before he could finish when he saw us looking in."

"We found this on the floor." Nigel held up a razor.

"It is mine—well, Mr. Harrington's," said Nathan. "Evans took it from me. How did it…?"

"The difference from a scalpel must have hindered his efforts."

"Not to mention that he was interrupted."

"We staunched the flow and sewed you up. There should be no more bleeding."

"But why was Robert trying to kill you?"

"I have no idea," said Nathan. "Who is Robert?"

"Do you recall that fellow who was drenched by the fountain outside Matthew's?"

"Why should he have any interest in me? Evans is the one I should fear."

Seeing the puzzlement on their faces, he told them everything. His confinement, and his imprisonment before that. The forgery. His time with Elaine. His longing to see his two friends. Even the razor. Everything.

"*Guy* Evans? I know the name," said Edward. "The banker Hume told me that Robert Barton was firmly in Evans's clutches. And now a razor confiscated by Evans has ended up in Robert's hand… . Evidence of

collusion, quite possibly?… Evans thought this razor was yours. He might have had Robert use it in the hope that people would think that you slit your own wrist."

"But how could Robert have been waiting for Nathan?" asked Nigel.

"Perhaps…" Nathan told them about the dog that had taken the same route as him from Evans's residence. "All the way to this building," he ended.

"Bess!" cried Edward. "Robert's wife was looking for her."

"But not looking over here," said Nigel. "She hates dissection rooms."

In a cheerless voice, Edward said, "I doubt Evans and Robert would be found guilty if we brought a formal complaint against them."

"This was only attempted murder, after all," Nigel agreed. "As for the confinement, they could come up with some excuse."

There was a moment's silence. "We have to do something to get rid of them. Otherwise, Nathan will never know the end of it."

"Get rid of them?" repeated Nathan, frowning.

"This is not their only crime," said Nigel. "We shall think of something. You must remain in hiding for a while."

At Edward's request, Nelly allowed Nathan to hide in her attic bedroom. The room was tiny, but far more tolerable than his quarters at the Barretts' had been. Nelly herself was sympathetic to his plight.

Three days later, on the ninth of July, Edward and Nigel came up late at night to announce that they had found a substitute body. Their standing order with some grave-robbers of their acquaintance for any male cadavers around the same age as Nathan had finally been filled. To pay for the body, Edward pawned his watch; the anatomy school's books were kept by Al Wood, so that source of funds was closed to them.

The cadaver Gobbin brought in was that of an orphan who had died of malnourishment. After saying a prayer for the boy, since no one was going to give him a proper funeral, they cut deeply into his left wrist. The scars on Nathan's ankles from his shackles could not be easily reproduced; but leaving the legs unmarked was not an option, so their solution was to amputate them. Then, deciding that this would be too suspicious, they removed the arms as well, keeping the latter safe in order to show the magistrate the wounded wrist later. After implicating Robert in the murder

with the ink, they wrapped the body in cloth and hung it from the winch in the fireplace, concealing it in the triangular space behind the fire door.

Early in the morning, the cadaver of Elaine Roughhead was brought in for Barton's research.

To hasten the discovery of the dead boy, Edward paid one of the street urchins to deliver an anonymous tip to the magistrate's office. Hales and Bray had arrived just as the pupils gathered to begin dissecting Elaine. *Hide it!* Clarence had said. Since Nathan's replacement was already attached to the hook, Edward and Nigel pretended to hang up the bundle containing Elaine's body, but in fact concealed it at the bottom of the flue. They did not realize at the time that Harrington's body had already been placed there by Dr. Barton.

Moore and Abbott arrived next, followed by Sir John. Events unfolded apace, of which Nathan, hiding in the attic, remained ignorant. He began to regain his strength. One day, when he descended the rear staircase to receive his meal from Nelly, a fat young man appeared and asked her if they had caught any rats. Nelly gestured with her chin towards the rat-catcher's cage.

"Sir John has asked to see you, Nelly," the chubby fellow added.

"What does the magistrate want with me?" she said, anxiety showing in her face.

Nathan was shaken too. The magistrate! Magistrates were people who sent offenders to Newgate. His forgery…

"You have nothing to worry about," the young man told her offhandedly, taking the cage and leaving, with Nelly following behind.

Nathan listened closely to the voices he could hear in the dissection room.

"Professor." That was the fat young one. "It seems that Nelly is now keeping urchins as well as rats."

"I don't keep rats. They keep themselves. The rat-catcher can't keep up. As for the boy, well, he came to the door lookin' fit to drop from hunger, so I gave him some broth and a crust of bread and let him rest a while."

"Is the boy very weak?" That was Nigel. He was doing a good job of dissembling.

"Well, he is one of those as eke out a livin' from beggin' and mudlarkin'. But please don't confine him, m'lord. He'll have his strength

back after a sit-down and a bite to eat, and then he'll surely find proper work. Give him a chance."

"Rest assured, Nelly, I am not cruel."

"Aye, I know it, m'lord. Everyone does. Sir John Fieldin', friend to the poor, scourge of the wicked. A man who'll give you a fair trial."

Having skilfully talked her way out of trouble, Nelly returned.

Later, she told him more about the magistrate.

"They say he can tell truth from lies just by listenin'. I was all on edge there. I suppose that since it wasn't an interrogation, he wasn't listenin' very hard. I thought my hair would go white in front of him."

Early the following morning, Edward came to take Nathan out of the house. "We have found somewhere safe for you," he said.

That somewhere was the third floor of the Temple Bank, where the Humes lived. Edward introduced Nathan to them, explained the circumstances, and asked for their help protecting him.

"Leave it to us, Edward," said Mr. Hume.

His wife lent Nathan a maid's uniform "so that it will not matter if anyone sees you." She snipped off some of her own long locks from the back of her neck, attached them to the inner band of a mob-cap, and placed it on his head. "There. You look just like a girl now," she said. "You can be Mary, our nursemaid."

To hide the new unevenness of her own hair, Mrs. Hume tied it up, her bare neck making her look a little slimmer.

"Please, do not tell anyone about this," Edward said to her. "Not even if the magistrate should ask. Or Professor Barton, of course. Any secrets he learns are plainly readable on his face."

"I am no master of deceit myself, but I shall do my best."

Edward kissed their sleeping infant and departed. A somewhat forlorn Nathan was treated kindly by the Humes and the baby took a liking to him, so before long he felt reasonably at ease.

Late that night, Nigel arrived. He had a bruise on his forehead that he claimed was from running into a signboard or something on the dark streets.

"Nathan," he said. "I want you to write down all you told us in a letter. We have decided to say that we found a letter in your pocket that explained everything, but we need an actual document to show the magistrate."

"Before my escape, I did in fact begin a letter to you," said Nathan.

“But I crumpled it up, having no way to get it to you.”

“Write it again. In detail. I should mention that your replacement died of malnourishment. He was skinny, and covered in bruises and worse. Write, therefore, that Evans was abusive, and virtually starved you.”

Nathan wrote the letter straight away.

“We should add a small ink-stain,” Edward suggested later. “We put your coat on the boy’s body while the ink on his chest was still damp, which made a stain near the inside pocket. If the letter was in there, it would be stained too.”

Also later, Nathan learnt that Edward had paid someone to injure him in order to claim that Evans had arranged the attack. This, in turn, was to support the information that Evans intended to make a huge sum by passing off Nathan’s forgery as genuine. The infection of the wound, which was meant to be a mere scratch, was something else he did not learn about until it was all over.

His days were spent peacefully with the Humes. They told him often how masterfully Edward and Barton had presided over the birth of Danny, and how good they were with the baby even now.

Finally, the day before the trial arrived. A message came for Hume from Nigel:

Please be in the public gallery at the Old Bailey tomorrow. Bring Mary.

And that was how Nathan and his mother were reunited.

Chapter 28

The sky was uncharacteristically blue. The cypress gleamed in the light and cast a sharp-angled shadow over the two graves. The coffins had already been lowered out of sight.

Nine people were gathered at the graveyard. There was Daniel Barton, along with three of his pupils, Al, Clarence, and Ben. The Humes were there, including Danny, as well as Nelly, her eyes so red and swollen from crying she could barely see. And, of course, Nathan Cullen.

Nelly was the only one weeping, and even she knew as well as the others that the coffins were empty.

The tears came just the same.

A few yards away from the assembly, Edward and Nigel stood together quietly. They were dressed as sombrely as Quakers, in black broad-brimmed hats and frock coats. The silver chain from a buttonhole of Edward's waistcoat was linked to the watch in his pocket. His fellow students had pooled their funds to get it out of hock.

"Once Robert and Evans were dead, the need to conceal Nathan was gone. Why did you wait until that moment to reveal him?"

Sir John had put this question to Edward reproachfully at the Old Bailey, after Lord Mansfield had found the two of them not guilty of Cullen's murder without even waiting for the jury's verdict. Not even the least experienced, most incompetent of lawyers could possibly have lost the case by then. In point of fact, Hooper had met Nathan in advance at the Humes' and had the circumstances explained to him.

"To humiliate and make an ass of both bench and bar," Edward replied. "The courts are good for nothing."

Professor Barton now finally understood how deeply Edward loathed a legal system that had unjustly condemned his father. More than a desire to help Nathan, had not his true purpose been a desire to mock the law, he asked him.

Edward exchanged a glance with Nigel.

"Sir John is fair, and honest—a rarity among those of his profession. To deceive him did bother us somewhat. In any case, although no trial is to be held for the other murders, apparently, we intend to punish ourselves for it.

By taking leave of this world. This was always our intention, from the moment we decided to get rid of Evans and Robert."

But there were times, he admitted, when they had wavered from this intention, even preparing an alibi for themselves by faking death by drowning for Robert.

"If you are thinking of suicide, I shall not permit it!" Barton told them.

They both smiled at him.

"Not dying. Disappearing," said Edward.

Barton felt an unspecified dread about the future on their behalf. What sort of life did they intend to lead? Had they really performed that bizarre ritual at the Rose—even if the leg thrown into the fire *had* only been an imitation?

For his sake, they had taken someone's life. They had then conspired to mislead a magistrate, a representative of the law—and Edward had enjoyed it. Nigel, too. . . . What on earth did Nigel have against the law? Whatever it was, it was enough apparently to give him no qualms about dying if by so doing he could embarrass the authorities. There was so much Barton did not know about the boy. Had his apparent kind-heartedness been only for show? He had strangled a man, after all. Was the cynical, callous side of him his true nature?

Barton remembered the night Edward had pressed him on his own feelings.

—Suppose that Nigel injured his right hand and could no longer do his illustrations. Would you dismiss him?

—I am not sure. I know what my answer should be. "Whatever may befall him, he matters to me." Replying in this way would satisfy most people. But without being placed in that situation, I cannot say how I would respond. Whether my feelings for him would wax with pity—or the opposite.

—The same, I suppose, would apply if I were to sustain some injury to my head and lose the power of reason, then.

—I am sorry, but my answer is the same. I know it is cold-blooded, but I cannot say otherwise.

—In other words, Professor, it is our talent that you value; without it, our lives have little worth.

Should he have given model answers, like a child slyly reading the

adults around him? Insisted that they would always matter to him, come what may?

But Edward was surely observant enough to perceive the falsehood and empty piety in that reply, if he had made it. Barton honestly had not known at the time how losing Nigel or Edward would make him feel.

His remaining three pupils, less discomposed, now began to sing to the empty coffins.

A hymn would have rung hollow under the circumstances. Instead, they chose the Dissection Song.

A was an Artery filled with injection;
B was a Beldam of awful complexion.
C was some Cartilage, that apple of Adam's;
D was the Diaphragm, prone to its spasms.
Lol de rol . . .

Nathan's mother had hoped that he would accompany her back to their village, but Nathan had refused. When he was still grieving at the news of Elaine's unnatural death, Hume had offered him financial support while he established himself as a writer in London. Tyndale, too, had finally read through his "ancient poem," and recognized his unusual gifts. He had promised to publish the work, sure that it would be the talk of the book trade (and a profit-maker) if word got around about a boy of seventeen writing such accomplished old English that it could be mistaken for the real thing. His poems "in the language of tomorrow," however, Tyndale called incomprehensible, and turned down. Undeterred, Nathan looked forward to pursuing that avenue further.

Mrs. Cullen had had some harsh words for Edward and Nigel for convincing her that her boy was dead, imposing on her the greatest suffering a mother can have. Subsequently, however, she had thanked them so warmly for saving his life that the two of them were embarrassed.

Then, after embracing her son, who was determined to stay in London, she boarded the stage-coach alone.

E was an Embryo in a glass case;
F was a Fracture that marred a bone's face.
G was for Gaiety, all free to share it;
H was a Headache from far too much claret.

A little further away stood Sir John Fielding, Anne Moore, and Dennis

Abbott in morning clothes. Anne had intervened on Abbott's behalf to help him keep his job, insisting that her work would suffer without him.

This was a funeral for two people who were still alive: their farewell to society.

Sir John doffed his cocked hat and held it to his breast.

Turning to see this, Barton suddenly wondered: had the magistrate seen through Edward's scheme, however vaguely? Had this been why he had kept him in the holding cell rather than throw him in prison? Had he intentionally taken the road Edward had sought to lead him down—willingly accepted the humiliation of being wrong—all to help Edward find peace from the violent grudge he had borne since losing his father?

Barton reflected on his own inability to believe that he had been innocent. When Edward had admitted to murder, Barton had only reeled. He should have fought for his pupil. *Edward would not kill a friend who had come to him for help. He is not a monster.* He felt deep regret for not affirming as much to Sir John. No wonder Edward had not trusted him enough to let him in on Nathan's true whereabouts.

Q were the Quacks, killing more than they heal;
R was the Rag-and-Bone, ready to deal.
S was a Scalpel, for stabbing precisely;
T was a Tourniquet, for strangling him nicely.

"Might not be the best song for the occasion, actually," muttered Clarence during the refrain.

U was an Ulcer, which hurt worse than sin;
V was for Vict'ry, which Bartonites win.
Next came the *W*hite Plague, contract it and weep;
While *X* was unknown—some secrets we keep!

Barton heard Edward and Nigel joining in quietly behind him.

Y stands for Your Friends, best wishes sincere;

And after the rest had finished their "lol-de-rols," the two continued to sing unaccompanied;

And *Z* for the Zanies who take their leave here.

They turned their backs on the others. Nathan seemed on the verge of running to them, but Al put his hand on the lad's shoulder to stop him. For the first time since coming to London, Nathan wept. The tears he had not shed even in prison now came freely.

Little Danny leaned out of Mrs. Hume's arms, reaching towards them.

Abbott clenched his trapper's teeth and resisted the urge to follow them.

Daniel Barton finally understood. If Edward had asked him that question again, he could answer truly, from the bottom of his heart, that he would always love them, come what may. If only he had been able sincerely to say as much then, perhaps Edward would have sought a more humane solution to their problems.

Come what may.

The words had come too late, but they swelled now in his heart until he spoke them aloud.

Edward and Nigel looked back one last time. Nigel blew them a faint kiss. Then they walked away.

Barton's remaining three pupils shovelled clods of earth onto the empty coffins. The cypress's shadow faded.

The sky wrinkled and turned the same colour as the earth.

THE END